NEOLIBERAL EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION?:
A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE OECD'S PRINCIPLES
FOR INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

by

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Abstract

In light of the globalizing trend of formal education, the research examines the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) policy document titled *Adapting Curriculum to Bridge Equity Gaps: Towards an Inclusive Curriculum* (TIC). Although the OECD is an international organization, most of its global initiatives take place in the Western countries, focusing on the improvement of their socioeconomic welfare. The paper examines the OECD’s aspirations through its equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) education initiatives, and examines how it manages the conflicting principles of neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and inclusive education through the TIC policy. The thesis is developed on the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the analytical frameworks of Norman Fairclough and Michel Foucault. By examining the language, discourses, and structure of the TIC document, the research sheds light on the underlying assumptions and ideologies that inform the OECD’s approach to EDI and examines how the document promotes neoliberal and neocolonial values. After a thorough textual analysis, this research concludes how the OECD’s advocacy for inclusive education achieves several goals: (1) equivocate discourse on EDI as inherently good, while targeting equity-deserving students for assimilation into Western education systems, (2) frame inclusive education to be beneficial not only for improved social justice but also for economic productivity, and (3) promote neoliberal coloniality and expresses the OECD’s aspiration to reinforce its position as an international organization and leader. The overarching goal of this thesis is to outline the underlying neoliberal and neocolonial implications of the OECD’s EDI policies.
Lay Summary

This research looks at the text and discourses in one of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)’s education initiatives on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI): *Adapting Curriculum to Bridge Equity Gaps: Towards an Inclusive Curriculum* (TIC). Through the methodology of Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Michel Foucault’s discourse analysis, the study aims to highlight some of the contradictions within the OECD’s document. As the OECD is primarily a transnational economic organization, the research sheds light on how the conflicting ideals of capitalism and inclusive education will be brought together in the context of global education. The study is structured around the frameworks of neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and neoliberal coloniality to analyze the OECD’s discourse on EDI in education. The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature and critiques on the OECD’s capitalist and colonial aspirations for global education systems in the modern era.
Preface

This thesis is an original, unpublished, and independent work by Seoyeon Hong.
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List of Abbreviations

CAST - Center for Applied Special Technology
CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis
EDI – Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
IMF – International Monetary Fund
IO – International Organization
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment
TIC – Adapting Curriculum Changes to Bridge Equity Gaps: Towards an Inclusive Curriculum
UDL – Universal Design for Learning
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WEIRD – Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic
Glossary

*Adapting Curriculum to Bridge Equity Gaps: Towards an Inclusive Curriculum* (TIC)

An OECD report that contains one of the six analyses on the four types of curricula (i.e., digital curriculum, personalised curriculum, cross-curricular competencies and content-based curriculum, and flexible curriculum), designed to provide comparative analyses and curriculum reforms for inclusive education (OECD, 2021).

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

A research methodology and a method of textual analysis that integrates relations of language and discourse with social elements, such as power, ideologies, and institutions (Fairclough, 2013).

**Design Thinking**

Design thinking is a human-centred approach to solving problems with a drive towards innovation (OECD, 2021). Design thinking developed greatly since its first mention by cognitive scientist Herbert Simon in 1969, integrating different approaches as an umbrella term for multi-disciplinary, human-centred methods to find creative solutions to problems (OECD, 2021).

**Developed/Developing Countries**

The data of this research (i.e., OECD’s TIC document) categorizes countries with the binary division of “developed” and “developing.” These terms, however, are imperfect (Hackenesch, Koch, & Ziaja, 2021) and fail to challenge the inherently colonial ideologies that assume the linear trajectory of human development as imposed by the Western, Eurocentric viewpoint (McGregor & Hill, 2009). While this research refers to these terms in reference to the data used, they face limitations and are contested in current literature.
Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

A framework that addresses and redresses the systemic marginalization of certain social groups in an attempt to remove prejudice and discrimination (Burke, Goriss-Hunter, & Emmett, 2023). In education, incorporating EDI into existing curricula calls for reforms that could cater to historically and systemically marginalized students’ diverse backgrounds and learning needs. The discussions around EDI are contested and its meaning and approach are perceived differently among scholars and policymakers.

Human Capital

A capitalist term that counts each individual’s worth as a form of capital and market actors in the economy. Friedman (1955) explained that an investment in education is crucial to increasing the productivity of a nation, just as, if not more than, investing in non-human capital.

Inclusive Education

As discussed in the OECD’s TIC document, inclusive education refers to providing all students opportunities to attain knowledge and skills by incorporating curriculum and pedagogy that attends to students’ individual learning needs (OECD, 2021). There is a debate (as later presented in this thesis) on “inclusion of what?” and the rationale behind inclusive education envisioned by the Western countries. This critical view highlights the limitations faced by the conceptualization of inclusive education and questions neoliberal coloniality that overlooks diversity.
Neocolonialism

Neocolonialism refers to the continual progression of colonialism by Western hegemony. It emphasizes the ongoing impacts of colonization of Western countries, which currently dominate the global economy and politics through a new (neo-) form of colonization (Nkrumah, 1965). The normalization of Western ideologies and standards are rooted in the neocolonial influences in contemporary politics and global (Sartre, 1964; Nkrumah, 1965).

Neoliberal Coloniality

A conceptual framework that refers to how the current trend of neoliberalism is interrelated with and deeply rooted in colonialism and neocolonialism (Spring, 2008b). Capitalism and white supremacy are inseparable in modern society, as the capitalism stems from the influence of global colonial powers (Bourassa, 2021).

Neoliberalism

A governing rationality that emphasizes market freedom and economic productivity (Rizvi et al., 2022). This policy/ideology assemblage encompasses phenomena such as deregulation, privatization, and corporatization of public goods and services and increased competition and audit culture.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

An international organization which develops evidence-based international standards on social, economic, and environmental challenges with national leaders and policymakers to improve standards of living for nations worldwide (OECD, n.d.). It is an economic organization which prioritizes productivity and efficiency which focuses on the production of human capital in designing education policies.
Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

A globally employed standardized test which measures 15-year-olds’ performance in the subjects of reading, mathematics and science and determines their knowledge and skills that are pertinent to real-life challenges (OECD, n.d.). PISA scores serve as an indicator for international and comparative education and policymaking at the national level.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

An educational framework that aims to improve teaching and learning for all students (CAST, 2018). The UDL Guidelines inform educators, teachers, policymakers, and parents how to make learning more accessible for all types of learners in any subject (CAST, 2018).

Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) nations

A term coined by Henrich et al. (2010), which describes how research and academia overlook diversity across human populations and often generalizes findings in understanding underrepresented populations.
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This thesis was written on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Ɂiləw̱ət/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) nations, where my current home is located. I am privileged to have learned on the land of the Musqueam people for seven years at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver campus) for the duration of my undergraduate and graduate studies.

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Dedication

In memory of my good friend, Andrew
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Overview of the topic

Formal education manifests in various forms internationally. It plays a crucial role in shaping communal ideologies, cultures, and values, while also serving as a practical tool for reinforcing power and hegemony. With globalization, international organizations like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have seized significant power and influence globally with the rationalizations that formal education is imperative to economic growth and development. One of the principal organizations that contribute to this global hegemony is the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD has made itself responsible for providing evidence-based policies and international standards for formal education to respond to a range of social, economic, and environmental challenges globally (OECD, 2021). In particular, the OECD is committed to shaping policies that foster prosperity, equality, and well-being for all, with the aims of building “better policies for better lives” (OECD, n.d.). The OECD works together with governments and policymakers to provide evidence-based international standards and solutions to a range of social, economic, and environmental challenges (OECD, n.d.). Its goals range from “improving economic performance and creating jobs to fostering strong education and fighting international tax evasion” (OECD, n.d.) to informing public policies at the international scope.

In the field of education, the OECD guides nations in identifying and developing “the knowledge and skills that drive better jobs and better lives, generate prosperity and promote social inclusion” (OECD, n.d.). Along with the OECD, various international organizations aim to reduce poverty and socioeconomic gaps through education (Friedman, 1955). One of the
OECD’s notable education programs is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which is a standardized exam that measures students’ skills (15-year-olds) in reading, mathematics, and science. Since 2000, more than three million students across ninety different countries have participated in PISA (OECD, 2019). With students’ PISA results and other educational data collected worldwide, the OECD develops and offers data-driven programs, policies, and strategies to compare national education systems (e.g., rankings) and improve educational outcomes and efficacies internationally. In its recent publication of Building the Future of Education (2022), the OECD stated that “[e]ducation systems have developed into major engines of economic growth and prosperity, nation and community building, and social progress” (p. 2). As an economic organization, it approaches education as a means to produce human capital and stimulate growth through competition (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). The OECD “has now become a policy player in its own right, influencing, cajoling and directing member states towards a predetermined social imaginary” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 38). The OECD, therefore, is an economic and neoliberal organization that designs education policies with a focus on the production of human capital and the creation of knowledge economy (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 16). The majority of the OECD’s international policies embody neoliberal values with the aim of producing human capital that is integral for economic growth and global competitiveness (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Rutkowski, 2007).

As this thesis argues, the OECD devotes a substantial proportion of its research to improving equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI hereafter) in accordance with its stated neoliberal agenda. In its review of economic and social outcomes led by its recent education policies, the OECD stated that the economic benefits are not limited to individuals but are also beneficial to the public (OECD, 2022). As educated citizens are likely to “earn more, pay higher taxes over a
lifetime, and cost less for their governments in terms of social entitlements and welfare,” the economic returns are expected to be greater at the tertiary level, and therefore, would lead to long-term social and economic benefits, such as increased equity and social mobility and reduced poverty (OECD, 2022). The OECD’s goals to enhance equity and inclusion arise from its ambition to develop economic programs through various transnational projects that embody the values of neoliberalism as well as neocolonialism. Its global initiatives are subsequently justified as fostering growth and civilizational progress (Gerrard, Sriprakash, & Rudolph, 2022) that embody colonial views on human development. Consequently, the OECD heavily regards education as a pathway to improved socioeconomic outcomes and for “preparing people to become and remain competent workers and active citizens” (OECD, 2022, p. 2) in Western views. I elaborate more on the conceptual frameworks of neoliberalism and neocolonialism to delineate how they are embedded into the OECD’s approach to inclusive education in the subsequent chapter.

On the OECD’s website for education, one of its featured tabs is the “Education Equity Dashboard,” which “is a tool for policy makers and the public to monitor country efforts to promote equity and inclusion in education” (OECD, 2023). This tool includes thirty-five key indicators that portray various dimensions of equity. The OECD outlines two main overarching aims for inclusive education, which are to “[enable] all learners to [develop] the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to thrive in equitable and inclusive societies” and to “[ensure] that education contributes to equitable economic and social outcomes” (OECD, 2023). Corresponding policy goals include increased support for teachers and allocation of resources during the early years of schooling, thereby raising educational outcomes and fostering more equitable opportunities (OECD, 2023).
This thesis analyzes the OECD’s recent report on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and its relevant policy implications. While these policies target the enhancement of EDI on a broad scale, the OECD’s underlying values and intentions for inclusive education are in question, considering that it is an economic and neoliberal organization. In essence, I question whether the OECD’s attention to EDI is an approach to simply neoliberalize and re-colonize formal education systems globally. Its aspiration for both economic development and inclusive education aims to combine, and perhaps reconcile, contradicting values together (i.e., the values of inclusion and competition). Neoliberalism, which advocates increased competition and performance-based approaches, stands in contrast to several principles of inclusive education, such as providing more educational opportunities for socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and removing the competitive nature of formal education. An example of this is the misalignment of its EDI policies that are informed by PISA scores, which are used to govern students through numerical metrics (Rose, 1991) and promote educational neoliberalism. Despite its ongoing EDI related initiatives, whether the practical implementations of these policies lead to a qualitative efficacy (i.e., enhanced educational experiences and convenience for students, parents, and teachers and reduced systemic injustices and inequalities) remains uncertain. In recognition of this issue, the intent of this research is to investigate how the OECD bridges this gap through an analysis of its discursive methods, strategies, and practices employed in its most recent EDI curriculum proposal.

Specifically, the research examines the OECD's policy document titled *Adapting Curriculum to Bridge Equity Gaps: Towards an Inclusive Curriculum* (hereafter TIC). The thesis employs the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), primarily using the analytical frameworks of Norman Fairclough and Michel Foucault. By examining the language, discourses,
and structure of the TIC document, the study aims to do accomplish two major goals: (1) to elucidate the underlying assumptions and ideologies that inform the OECD’s approach to EDI, and (2) to address how the document reconciles its approach to the OECD’s conception of EDI in relation to its avowed and ongoing commitments to promote neoliberal competition to govern and, perhaps, re-colonize global education. In doing so, this research provides insights into the organization’s priorities and how it plans to shape particular ideas of EDI, possibly suggesting that EDI to be compatible with neoliberal competition, in formal education.

1.2. Statement of the problem

The thesis is developed on two major conceptual frameworks: neoliberalism and neocolonialism. I provide a robust definition of both terms in Chapter 2. Overall, the main issue this research addresses is two-fold. First, I propose to highlight how the OECD manages to reconcile competing educational values between neoliberalism and its conceptions of EDI through its sophisticated use of language and discourse. Second, I intend to extend the analysis of the OECD’s discursive strategies to argue that these strategies are a method of employing a dual system of neoliberal and neocolonial education globally (Spring, 2008b).

Formal education is often conceived and practiced as a way of training, producing, and maintaining a workforce for poverty reduction and maximized economic efficiency. For instance, Wendy Brown (2015) discusses this idea as the production of human capital in higher education systems, while Stephen J. Ball (2016) makes a similar argument to the K-12 sector. In a free-market economy, one’s academic performance (i.e., level of education, academic record, enrollment in prestigious institutions) critically influences one’s career outcomes. Students in competitive educational environments are faced with several issues, such as educational privatization (Ball, 2009) and widening gaps of inequality (Froese-Germain, 2001), which
further marginalize students who cannot achieve assessment goals (Lipman, 2011). Likewise, discussions on inclusive education are often managed through neoliberal vernacular, with claims that increased accessibility in education would lead to increased productivity in human capital and economic growth. In current capitalist societies, however, economic growth is fueled by competition, which contradicts several values of inclusive education, particularly equity and inclusion. While there have been active discussions by various educational institutions on improving equity and inclusion in their existing curricula, there has been a lack of discussion on how effective some of these policy attempts have been. As such, I argue in this thesis that EDI policies must take a critical reform approach (discussed in subsequent chapters) and focus on addressing the injustices within formal education, rather than aiming to develop ways that students are assimilated into the current Western education system.

As the OECD is an economic organization, how it bridges its contradicting values of economic development (i.e., competition) and inclusive education (i.e., equity and inclusion) provides insights into how curriculum and policy are designed to enforce students to adapt to Western educational standards (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). My research is designed to incorporate recommendations to analyze the OECD’s education policies in relation to “[c]ompeting and contradictory desires, logics, expectations and comportments that have to be reconciled for policy-making to act as a tool for coordination” (Thompson, Sellar, & Buchanan, 2022, p. 691). An analysis of the competing logics of the OECD’s education policies aims to examine the TIC document in a more nuanced understanding of the policy as the management of contradictions and competing aspirations (Webb, 2014; Webb & Gulson, 2015a), where the neoliberal and capitalist views eclipse the social justice approach to EDI.
In addition, the OECD’s approach to curriculum development oversimplifies the socioeconomic and cultural differences among countries globally, while enforcing Western and neocolonial methods of education (Marshall & Batten, 2004; Spring, 2008a). The TIC document offers policy recommendations and educational design methods for its participating countries. Although the TIC may stem from well-disposed intentions, it lacks a critical understanding of its own organizational practices that allow for the reforms the OECD aspires to make through the production of TIC. For instance, the OECD captures various socioeconomic factors of its members, but neglects national diversities that impact educational experiences of students. Moreover, the socioeconomic disparities among individuals, as well as nations, are minimally addressed in the TIC. These inequalities are not only caused by the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism but also further exacerbated by the neocolonial education policies. The OECD’s approach to EDI embodies a neoliberal and neocolonial ethos and advocates equity in an extractive manner that aims to produce and govern students as human capital (Marshall & Batten, 2004). Consequently, whether students in the OECD member countries will benefit from the OECD’s EDI project remains in question (Broesch et al., 2020). The TIC document enforces Western standards and imaginaries and fails to jettison its neoliberal approach to educational governance. Assessing the OECD’s ongoing efforts of curriculum reform, an evaluation of how practical and applicable its EDI initiatives would provide significant policy implications on improving equity and inclusion in a globally employed education system.

1.3. Study purpose and research questions

The purpose of my research is to analyze the OECD’s conceptions of EDI and in relation to its goals to improve students’ global competencies. The goal is to demonstrate how the OECD’s discussion on EDI is incorporated into its current neoliberal and neocolonial approaches
to education. For instance, a number of scholars have also investigated the rhetoric and puffery of the OECD’s educational equity initiatives in accordance with neoliberal values (Bergeron, 2008), neoliberal social justice (Liasidou & Symeou, 2018) neoliberal multiculturalism (Bourassa, 2021), and coloniality (Shahjahan, 2016; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). However, there is little to no critical research done on the TIC specifically as well as on the ways the OECD manages the discourses of EDI generally.

The OECD’s TIC document involves an analysis of nearly forty member and partner countries and economies. The OECD influences educational programs based on the numerical data derived by its standardized performance scores (i.e., PISA), along with other socioeconomic and cultural datasets provided by each country. Arguably, these quantitative approaches and data-driven methods neglect the sociopolitical and cultural differences of each country. In discussing EDI in education, quantitative methods connote equity-deserving students as “problematic” to society for failing to meet Western educational standards. Its proposal of universally applicable learning methods disregards sociocultural differences that exist across various nations and enforce Western and neocolonial views which promote values of neoliberalism (Olssen, Codd, & O’Neill, 2004).

The OECD’s current approach to EDI also overlooks the fundamental issues caused by the West with its persisting systemic colonial practices that promote elitism, economize education and education policies, and mediate global diversity for its own goals (Spring, 2015). The OECD heavily embodies the Western views of education and disregards global diversity unless to utilize such a concept for its benefit. The OECD and other mainstream international organizations celebrate diversity only under the circumstances where white supremacy is maintained. Therefore, its discourse on EDI often lacks practical policy implications for
educational environments that differ from those in Western countries, while also failing to account for the influence of neocolonial education practices that are responsible for the production of inequalities they attempt to address. In this research, I focus on how the OECD acknowledges, yet ignores, the causes of these inequalities by analyzing its discourse of EDI in the TIC document. I problematize the OECD’s aims to homogenize education systems in its EDI project by proposing the following research questions:

1. What are the discursive strategies of the OECD’s TIC project and how do they reflect and interact with the ideologies, governing tactics, and power dynamics of neoliberal coloniality in education?

2. In what ways does the language used in the OECD's TIC document mediate or otherwise reconcile the principles of EDI in conjunction with the assumptions, values, and biases related to neoliberal coloniality in education?

The purpose of this research entails analyzing the discourse to evaluate the document’s discourse on EDI.

1.4. Significance and limitations of the study

The significance of this research is its aims to contribute to the expanding literature on the values of EDI and juxtaposing them to the colonial and neoliberal aspirations in global education policy. By providing an extensive analysis on the OECD’s perspective of incorporating EDI in educational policy, the study challenges the OECD’s priorities and potential influence on the future of many education systems worldwide. As the research primarily focuses on the language use and structures of the document in conjunction with the broader context of educational neoliberalism and colonialism with topics on EDI, this study highlights the document’s position within its emerging literature and facilitates more informed
discussions in the later chapters on how these policy contradictions are used to manage and reproduce existing social and economic relationships.

Despite its significance, the study also faces limitations. The TIC document draws upon several comprehensive sets of data from its member and partner countries. As it is a global organization, it presents simplified and filtered data—as opposed to raw datasets—which potentially filters out contexts and additional information that may be pertinent to this research. Because the report itself provides filtered data, the scope of the research is limited likewise. Ideally, the TIC would be reviewed more in detail, focusing significantly on the variability of sociopolitical, cultural, and other varying factors of each country. As this research is conducted for the fulfillment of a master’s thesis, the research focuses on the OECD’s discursive strategies and its proposed learning frameworks in the document. This section will be discussed more in detail in the subsequent chapter.

1.5. Researcher positionality

I am a female Korean immigrant who came to study in Canada twelve years ago. When I was thirteen, our family immigrated from South Korea to Canada in hopes of laying out a less competitive and stressful path for our education. South Korea is known for being one of the most competitive societies in the world, where many students from a very young age engage in private education through "hagwons" (학원), which are after-school classes designed to help students excel in academic performances and extracurricular activities. I have experienced both the two different, and yet similar, competitive educational environments in South Korea and Canada (specifically British Columbia). These education systems significantly shaped my current educational philosophy, and my background as an educational immigrant plays a significant role in this research.
My undergraduate specialization is economics, a field of study which emphasizes productivity and economic growth as key indicators of national welfare. In my second year, I took a course on globalization that was taught by a professor who expressed his views on the ideal direction that globalization should take. In his perspective, revitalizing diversity and differences across the globe, as opposed to the domination of one culture homogenizing distinctive communities, would result in less victimization of vulnerable groups. As of 2024, I believe that the world is taking a step further toward the latter, where economically dominant countries oversee and dictate international matters. The current trend of globalization is leading to a widening gap of socioeconomic inequality, which consequently results in increased educational inequality. Students from more affluent backgrounds are given prestigious educational opportunities, while equity-deserving students face challenges due to a wider system of social inequity. This phenomenon can be attributed to heightened competition, prevalence of an audit culture, and privatization of education.

My intrinsic motivation of pursuing this research topic stems from recognizing such privileges. As an immigrant, settler, and graduate student, I intend to contribute to discussions on inclusive and equitable education. Through this research, I aim to explore my research interests and passion by evaluating globally implemented educational programs and policies, while also addressing and acting on the dominance of and the injustices within Western hegemony.

1.6. **The structure of the thesis**

The research is organized into five chapters. This chapter provided an overview of the topic and the researcher positionality. Chapter 2 discusses the conceptual frameworks and the review of literature, expanding on how neocolonialism and neoliberalism tie into the reading of the TIC report. Chapter 3 explores the research methods and methodology and presents how data
is examined for the purpose of this research. Chapter 4 presents the CDA of the TIC document with a preliminary analysis and a sequence of analyses using the methodologies explained in the previous chapter, relating the notion of power, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism. Chapter 5 concludes the research and highlights significant findings and future policy implications.

In the next chapter, I delve into the two primary theoretical frameworks that underpin this research: neoliberalism and neocolonialism. I explore the relevant literature associated with these frameworks, providing an overview of the terms and their applicability in analyzing the OECD's TIC document, particularly its discourse on EDI and inclusive education.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

For this chapter, I reviewed the existing literature on neoliberalism and neocolonialism within global education programs and policies that shape formal education. This review of the literature was designed to develop a framework to understand neocolonialism and neoliberalism respectively, and in relation to how each idea assists and supports each other. This research also refers to various theories and frameworks that are often contested and subject to various interpretations among a vast number of literatures. As they were not the main focus of this research, those topics (e.g. EDI and international and comparative education) will only be covered briefly in this thesis.

First, I examine the very concept of global education, questioning how the ongoing impacts of colonialism persist within this framework and lead to the homogenization of education under Western and colonial views. Then, I study neoliberal politics and structures in emphasizing their deep integration of and inseparability from current international education programs. Finally, the frameworks of neoliberalism and neocolonialism are applied to analyzing the OECD’s past and current education projects as well as the TIC itself, which was written in an attempt to improve equity, diversity, and inclusion in global education. As the TIC is designed to inform policymakers with various approaches to inclusive education, evaluating the interrelationships of neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and inclusive education was necessary prior to discussing the research methodology and conducting a textual analysis of the OECD’s TIC document in Chapter 3.

2.1. Globalization and the OECD’s role on international education

Globalization operates in an economic framework in an interconnectedness of social, political, and economic governance of nations worldwide based on their market relationships
Rizvi and Lingard, in their *Globalizing Education Policy* (2009), specifically categorize this as neoliberal globalization, characterized by “a preference for the minimalist state, concerned to promote the instrumental values of competition, economic efficiency and choice, to deregulate and privatize state functions” (p. 31). While globalization is often discussed in terms of achieving interconnectedness and harmonization, it simultaneously fosters competition and capitalism on a global scale.

In education, globalization is also responsible for the free flow of ideas and ideologies as well as the emergence of global or international education (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). A number of intergovernmental organizations, such as the OECD and the World Bank, have led global education initiatives, gathering data to formulate policies that are designed to “develop competencies for global citizenship and literacy for sustainable development through various learning experiences” (OECD, 2021, p. 103). In particular, the OECD was originally established as the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) to aid in the post-World War II recovery of the European economy (Sellar & Lingard, 2013; 2014; Sjøberg, 2020). Since the mid-1990s, the OECD has significantly intensified its commitment to international education, solidifying its position as a key player in technical expertise, data collection, and analysis (Sellar & Lingard, 2013; 2014). Sellar and Lingard (2013; 2014) argued that the end of the Cold War and the rapid progression of globalization have led to an increasing demand for comparative performance data that influence policies at the national level. The shift from its former designation to its current title signifies the organization's ambition to wield global influence over its member countries, assuming a vital role in shaping education policies worldwide.

The OECD pursues this objective through initiatives such as PISA and other data-driven policy recommendations, which actively contribute to the establishment of educational standards
in response to the challenges facing the global economy (Sjøberg, 2020). The OECD stated in its recent *Building the Future of Education* (2022) on the importance of “seizing the opportunities of the digital transformation; helping to ensure well-functioning global markets and; advancing OECD standards, through membership and partnerships and a sound approach to development” (p. 1). In this document, the OECD reiterates its values on national welfare that is achieved through improved market performance. The ostensibly benevolent intent of the OECD’s advocacy for economic prosperity leads countries worldwide to adopt the OECD’s policy implications and prioritize the organization’s goals into consideration at the national level. The shared neoliberal policy objectives of the OECD and national economies have given rise to novel forms of global educational governance (Sellar & Lingard, 2013), described by Rutkowski (2007) as "soft convergence" and "soft governance." Soft governance is predominantly evidenced by the impact of globalization and global policies on national educational policies, governance structures, and legal frameworks (Sellar & Lingard, 2014; Rutkowski, 2007; Niemann & Martens, 2018). Intergovernmental organizations like the OECD utilize the collected data to create global standards that have widespread application. The OECD's standards for international comparative education influence policies that contribute to educational convergence, resulting in the homogenization of education systems within the frameworks of neocolonialism and neoliberalism.

The OECD shapes education as a gateway for human capital development with its advocacy for lifelong learning and knowledge economies (Sellar & Lingard, 2014). Valiente (2014) observed the organization’s focus on “incentivizing the participation of inactive individuals in the labour market through retraining and up-skilling […] and] fostering entrepreneurship and supporting employers in the creation of highly skilled jobs” (p. 40). The
OECD associates education with economic prosperity, which primarily benefits large multinational corporations and select global elite groups (Sleeter, 2014). As the Euro-American perspective that believes economic welfare equates to reduced poverty and inequality is normalized (Lakes, 2014), economically developing countries often refer to the trajectories of how the current wealthy countries have fostered their growths. The OECD conceptualization of global education “offers panaceas for the global economy” (Spring, 2008a, p. 31) through conducting international testing programs like PISA and gathering educational data, thereby contributing to what Spring (2015) refers to as the "economization of education." In the subsequent sections, I conduct an in-depth literature review of this concept with regards to the frameworks of neocolonialism and neoliberalism in explaining how education is considered a crucial factor to fostering economic productivity and development.

2.2 Neocolonialism in international education

Throughout my research, I use the term neocolonialism to refer to the ever-ongoing processes of colonialism by European and other WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) nations (Henrich et al., 2010). The ideology of neoliberalism was expanded through the works of African scholars, such as Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (1964) and Kwame Nkrumah’s *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). According to their analysis of the colonial influences in the contemporary politics and global economy, non-WEIRD countries are subject to the normalization of Western ideologies and standards, while also being trapped within the influences of the WEIRD nation (Sartre, 1964; Nkrumah, 1965). Neocolonialism is perpetuated through the enduring effects of colonization while still aligning with Western imperial perspectives of dominance (Nkrumah, 1965). The non-WEIRD nations’ dependency on the Western hegemony can be interpreted as the new form of
colonization that is deeply tied to the capitalist societies of the Western countries, where wealth equates to power (Brown, 2015). Consequently, WEIRD countries wield global influence through their social, political, and economic power, and therefore, establish a new (neo-) form of colonization (Fanon, 1952; wa Thion’o, 1986). Through this new form of colonization, foreign capital is exploited at the expense of non-WEIRD countries, thereby increasing the inequality gap between the rich and the poor countries (Fanon, 1952; Altbach & Kelly, 1978).

In the context of education, neocolonialism is manifested in the form of international comparative education and globalizing education policies that aspire to homogenize diverse education systems and govern students with Western educational standards (Fanon, 1952). In a globalized educational sphere, intergovernmental organizations (IOs) that are established in the WEIRD nations demonstrate neocolonial values as a means of controlling the production of human capital and the distribution of knowledge by strengthening an education monopoly or oligopoly of the process (Rutkowski, 2007). A pertinent example to this research is the OECD’s collection of PISA results and data, which serves as a basis for policy recommendations that influence decision-making at the national level. Non-WEIRD countries adopt policies and integrate the WEIRD countries’ view on education as the goals of achieving economic prosperity and development are normalized. However, the very concept of “development” is inherently colonial (Ika & Hodgson, 2014; Hodge, 2017) and leaves numerous non-WEIRD nations dependent on and vulnerable to the influence of WEIRD nations in their educational approaches and values. As highlighted earlier, this not only fosters educational convergences but also reinforces the dominance of intergovernmental organizations and their influence on education programs, policies, and repercussions on national-level policies.
Spring (2008a) explained that neocolonialism is facilitated by intergovernmental organizations, multinational corporations, and trade agreements, all of which are responsible for fulfilling the interests of WEIRD nations and the elite class. International education programs are premised on white supremacy and enforced by WEIRD nations’ aspiration for economic development (Fanon, 1952; Gillborn, 2005; Webb & Gulson, 2015b). This educational approach is framed as a benevolent gesture from the world's most powerful and wealthy leaders, and the approach is designed to establish universally applicable education systems and policies. However, it may inadvertently result in biased and misinformed policies in various parts of the world (Andreotti et al., 2018; Carnoy & Rothstein, 2013; Carnoy et al., 2016). The very claim of a universally applicable education system and policy is colonial because it imposes and naturalizes a single story of human learning, progress, and development (wa Thiong’o, 1986), which ignores, erases, and pathologizes other modes of education. In addition, data derived from research is selectively interpreted to serve as evidence for policy implications that reinforce neocolonial powers, while theories, ideologies, and other conceptual frameworks that challenge these views are often neglected in the process (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Stein, Andreotti, & Suša, 2019). By claiming that its policies are data-driven and scientific, the OECD de-politicizes and de-historicizes Western science, claiming it as the only universal and valuable truth and knowledge. The OECD’s “scientific approach to political decision making” allowed for its growth as a transnational organization as well as its influence on global education (Grek, 2009, p. 25). The standards of development and modernity in the Western context trace back to Europe's imperial history that now has been evolving into a capitalist empire. WEIRD nations, rooted in such colonial history, hold leading positions in the global economy and address international social issues (Fanon, 1952; wa Thiong’o, 1986). They often champion initiatives
that appear beneficial for economically disadvantaged countries (Shahjahan, 2016), which often masks their colonial histories of violence and exploitation. As such, some critics view neocolonial globalization as reinforcing Western hegemony (Shahjahan, 2016) and call for reforms that dismantle the existing systems of imperialism.

Some authors critique intergovernmental education reform projects for not only failing to acknowledge the root cause of their issues, but also reinforcing the hegemony and existing forces of white supremacy. For example, Andreotti et al. (2018) argued that many educational reforms fail to acknowledge, address, and dismantle the historical and ongoing patterns of colonialism and oppression, which arguably would renew colonialism. Global issues require a painstaking effort to address the historical and ongoing structures that reproduce inequity and reinforce neocolonialism. Andreotti et al. (2018) also emphasized that approaches to education that are motivated by linear economic growth will likely take a soft reform approach to preserve existing systems and institutions. Andreotti’s earlier work (2006) commented on the soft and critical citizenship education in identifying global inequity and ways to address such issues. The critical approach views injustices to perpetuate systemically, structurally, and individually (Andreotti, 2006, p. 47-48). This critical viewpoint on reform provides more autonomy for individuals (and systems) to define their own growth and development, “[p]romoting engagement with global issues and perspectives and an ethical relationship to difference, addressing complexity and power relations” (Andreotti, 2006, p. 48).

Additionally, the very idea of “educational reform” is often deeply entrenched in neocolonial values and neoliberal practices (Ball, 2020). Within the discourses of educational equity, Ball and Collet-Sabe (2022) argued that EDI relies on a “taken for granted epistemological point of departure” (p. 987) where schools are considered beneficial and
necessary sites for education with inevitable side effects such as inequality and exclusions that could be mitigated through constant reform. Webb and Mikulan (2021) further offered a perspective that frames formal education as a form of captivity for students and advocated the liberation of “educational fugitives” (p. 1319) from such confinement.

Compared to soft reform approaches, critical reform approaches may face challenges in their practical implementation, despite their valuable insights into the necessary directions for change. Critical reform approaches are often considered radical in contrast to the small incremental changes that soft reform approaches take in upholding the status quo and continuously perpetuating the existing injustice and inequality. However, critical reform approaches are necessary as failure to acknowledge the historical roots and foundations of education systems that are deeply rooted in colonialism hinders organizational attempts at making meaningful change and limits them to superficial adjustments (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Embracing critical approaches to reforms becomes crucial for dismantling systemic inequities and creating more inclusive educational systems. A true (critical) reform for improved EDI must involve discussions on dismantling coloniality and the global hegemony of power that (re)configures education around the “the needs of capital and for the benefit of white European peoples” (Shahjahan, 2016, p. 696). As such, this research documents and illustrates how the OECD cannot truly incorporate increased EDI in its programs without critiquing and dismantling its own neocolonial and neoliberal views on education.

2.3. Neoliberalism in global education

Neoliberalism is a reimagined form of liberalism that emerged in the late twentieth century, which emphasizes economic freedom and competition for maximized productivity
(Rizvi et al., 2022). Best known economic practices were Thatcherism (the United Kingdom) and Reaganomics (the United States), which introduced policies that encouraged deregulation, privatization, and corporatization and instilled various audit cultures. These neoliberal policies were responsible for the creation of competitive and performance-based societies in the WEIRD countries (Brown, 2015; Rizvi et al., 2022). Education was not an exception to this ideology. In fact, it was considered an essential step for human capital development and training, shaped and governed by policies that prioritized economic efficiency.

For instance, Becker (1993) analyzed education to be an “investment to human capital” (p. 245) and an invaluable resource for the economy, as an increased level and quality of education was considered to result in an increased economic return and productivity for individuals and society (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1971). Friedman (1955) elucidated that an investment in human capital was considerably more efficient than an investment in fixed capital. This view considers education equivalent to an equity investment, with the government acting as the lender and those receiving education as the borrower. Education, in this context, operates as a part of the human capital market, where the lender collects the principal with accumulated interests in the form of labor. In this perspective, education becomes a vital element that constitutes economic development and profit for the nation-state.

Understanding the role of neoliberalism in education requires the question of how and why certain policies are made. The objective of a capitalist economy is to enable market forces to reach a state of pareto efficiency (i.e., economic growth that leaves no individual worse off). Drawing from Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, education is one of the ways in which the state can train citizens into human capital and exert biopolitical control over its population (Foucault, 1990). Ball (2020) added that education is “a complex of power relations concerned
with the manufacture and management of individuals and the population” (p. 871), which makes it a key space of regulation or biopower. This neoliberal governmentality (Olssen et al., 2004) is often manifested through government interventions on education policies, such as the allocation of funding and resources, privatization, deregulation, accountability, and ranking schemes.

The earlier point from Webb and Mikulan (2021) on educational fugitives also delineates how the population is kept under government control and forced to learn under curricula influenced by this neoliberal governmentality. While neoliberalism and globalization are often theoretically framed by the idea of minimal government intervention and increased freedom (Olssen et al., 2004), this is not necessarily true. WEIRD education policies target less productive citizens who are deemed to be in need of extra attention and “corrective measures” for their increased contribution to society’s economic welfare. Ball (2020) argued that some of these education policies are heavily impacted by the colonial, biopolitical, and even eugenicist ideologies that are far from the social justice standpoint. The OECD’s aim to improve EDI implicitly suggests students who fail to meet its international education standards require special attention to maintain functionality and productivity of a capitalist system.

Neoliberal governmentality at the international level (e.g., IMF, OECD, UNESCO, World Bank) substantially influences national policies and strengthens the global economy by widening inequality gaps among wealthy and poor countries. An emphasis on national productivity and welfare, as measured by indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), marginalizes the vulnerable groups, leading to exploitation and increased inequalities of wealth and power. Likewise, neoliberal education is shaped around various audit cultures and measurement of educational outcomes. As our current society revolves around capital, numbers serve as socioeconomic indicators and tools for determining one’s value and role in society.
These ideologies also apply to formal education, in which students are evaluated in numbers that assess their capabilities and potential as human capital.

Rose (1991) introduced the idea of ‘governing by numbers’ to refer to the ways that educational policies have been designed using scores and other various performance indicators to hold formal education institutions accountable. A prevalent example of how education is governed by numbers is the dizzying array of school, university, and country rankings. Consequently, policy instruments and performance-based culture now play a significant role in governance of national education (Grek, 2009). As such, the use of numerical academic evaluations instills an audit culture in the early stages of education, exerting control and governance for socioeconomic purposes (Webb, 2005; 2006). In this process, individuals are reduced to human capital and integrated into calculations and politics. This calls for consideration of the very framework that presents numbers as the objective, empirical, and absolute measures of knowledge that are often used in favour of policies that promote and reinforce neoliberalism and neocolonialism.

The role of performance accountability has grown so significantly in our society that it began to overshadow equity concerns. Individuals bear a considerable share of responsibilities when they fail to commit to their expected contributions to the economy. As Grek (2009) highlighted, academic evaluations and standardized exams (i.e., PISA) have “referred as central to national economic competitiveness within an economistic human capital framework and linked to an emerging ‘knowledge economy’” (p. 24). The quantification of students' academic performance through numerical measures like test scores and GPA tends to foster competition rather than cooperation. This approach has a detrimental effect on students' education, which defeats the fundamental purpose of education: learning. Competition sets up a dichotomy of
winners and losers, transforming education into a privilege (Mac, 2021). Taking this into account, a neoliberal organization cannot advocate for EDI and minority rights without a critical assessment of its current programs and policies that view education as a means for human capital development and a tool for governance.

2.4. Neoliberal coloniality

A neocolonial analysis is helpful in understanding how education functions to maintain the wealth and power of privileged nations and individuals in a globalized economy (Spring, 2008b, p. 344). In assessing OECD’s TIC document, I combine neoliberalism and neocolonialism as a conjoined term: “neoliberal coloniality.” Bourassa (2021) argued that capitalism and white supremacy are entangled, and neither can be abolished without eradicating the other. As discussed earlier, the influence of global colonial powers extends into an interconnected capitalist system, which can be seen as a new form of colonialism, or neocolonialism (Spring, 2008b). This hegemony is reinforced and extended through intergovernmental organizations as well as multinational corporations which exert neocolonial powers that promote free market economies, competitive human capital education, and neoliberal school systems (Spring, 2008b). These systemic manifestations of neoliberal coloniality contribute to the continued marginalization and widened gap of inequality worldwide.

In Figure 1, Andreotti et al. (2018) introduced a metaphor where the house symbolizes a structure established and protected by the nation-state, promising to ensure security and order for its citizens. First, the house is isolated from the outside world by the wall of supposedly universal Enlightenment knowledge (i.e. Western knowledge and education) with its underlying structure of separability. Moreover, it is built under a regime of continual capital accumulation (represented by the roof), which exploits human labour, appropriates lands and lives through
processes of slavery and colonization, and views natural resources to be extracted freely for the profit for a select few (p. 22). The profits made are then protected by the nation-state for oligarchy, which maintains power upon void promises of increased economic and social welfare and growth. This capitalist regime, however, further marginalizes the citizens who are exploited for profit, resulting in increased inequality and inaccessibility to basic human needs.

Figure 1. “The House That Modernity Built” (Andreotti et al., 2018, p. 18)

The house metaphor highlights the absence of true democracy in these neoliberal and neocolonial institutional practices that govern and exploit citizens. The figure further illustrates cracks and leaks in the walls and floors that support the overall structure of the house. This imagery is applicable to the OECD’s TIC document and its approaches to EDI reform, as 1) it asserts that the Western way of knowing is the universal truth, 2) promotes competition and individualism, and 3) ostracizes those who do not meet the Western capitalist standards from the mainstream economy and society. It also serves as a reminder to scholars and policymakers
about the challenges and flaws in the educational systems and prompts the consideration of a reform approach that would effectively address the systemic inequalities that pose threats to the existing structures.

While the goals of international organizations are focused on poverty reduction and economic welfare, Shahjahan (2016) suggested that they often approach global issues through a Western lens. In other words, international organizations lead initiatives that are seemingly beneficial for non-WEIRD countries but tend to further perpetuate neocolonialism through their economic powers and influences. As long as Western hegemony continues to dictate international economy and politics, non-WEIRD countries are subjugated to WEIRD nations. This colonial system is inextricable not only because the non-WEIRD countries are tied to this subjugation economically, but also because the very concept of economic development is normalized to be inherently beneficial (Lakes, 2014; Andreotti et al., 2018; Ball & Collet-Sabe, 2022). With respect to this research, the OECD’s education programs and policies potentially restrict the political autonomy of other nations (Shahjahan, 2016) and their ability to decide their own distinctive educational policies that are more suited to their distinctive socioeconomic settings, cultural contexts, and worldviews. Therefore, the neoliberal approach to education plays a key role in global education policies that place WEIRD countries as the world leaders.

2.5. Neoliberal equity, EDI, and critiques on the OECD’s education policies

I introduce the term “neoliberal equity” to explain how inclusive education serves in the OECD’s rhetoric in the TIC with regards to the frameworks of neoliberalism and neocolonialism, often through global education policies. I use this term throughout my research as a way to signal some of the contradictions in the OECD’s TIC. Within equity-deserving groups, students
experience various intersectional social and educational disadvantages based on their intellectual, biographical, and socioeconomic differences (Liasidou, 2013) in hierarchical and systemically oppressive structures that disempower students based on these differences. Stein et al. (2022) proposed the question of on whose terms equity and inclusion are defined. If the goal of inclusive education is to increase productivity, the student groups considered in these policies are ironically excluded from such benefits. In other words, equity-deserving students are regarded as a demographic falling short of the benchmarks set by the rapid, competitive, and neoliberal education systems. Returning to the question of on whose terms inclusive education is defined, this research draws upon the question: who do EDI education programs benefit?

The framework of EDI is a contested term. As introduced by international economic organizations such as the OECD, it is tangentially concerned with social justice (Lingard, Sellar, & Savage, 2014; Bhopal & Shain, 2014). Presently, equity education is predominantly preoccupied with addressing underachievement and narrowing the achievement gap to maximize productivity and capitalize diversity in an international context (Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, & Martino, 2017, p. 161). While EDI policies should take a critical reform approach in addressing systemic injustices and “encountering resistance and countering that resistance” (Ahmed, 2020, p. 175), the OECD’s commitment to equitable education is motivated by the principles of economic efficiency. Such economic institutions regard the better-educated population for their potential to contribute to economic development (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009).

The issue is that the commitment to enhancing equity in education primarily is associated with sociopolitical goals subservient to economic considerations. Instead, EDI policies and practices ought to address the very real set of power relations that constitute and reproduce neocolonial and neoliberal education practices. Mac (2021) suggested that equity-deserving
students who are pressured to be productive in a neoliberal education system results in “their sustained lower status, rather than the upward mobility promised by privatization proponents” (p. 18). Using EDI as a mechanism to compel students to meet the standardized academic requirements could lead to further marginalization and inequality.

Equity and inclusive education and the relevant policies are determined on the OECD’s numerical evaluation of student achievement and other forms of quantitative data. The concept of neoliberal equity best describes the OECD’s stance on EDI, as it is primarily concerned with increased productivity of students as human capital, rather than the quality of learning experiences at schools. The OECD has actively participated in identifying the skills and competencies that are essential for human capital (Takayama, 2013), which has led them to become a prominent actor in global education policies and provide standardized indicators for educational achievements that substantially affect policymaking at the national level (Sellar & Lingard, 2014). The OECD's quantitative assessment of global student achievement, coupled with its emphasis on enhanced productivity, brings this thesis to question whether its discourse on EDI genuinely prioritizes the well-being of the students targeted by these policies or the neoliberal objectives for improved quantitative outcomes. The OECD’s statistical and comparative analyses on education are vulnerable to policy implications, inadequately addressing the issues of structural inequality and inequity in education (Sellar & Lingard, 2014).

In his *Globalization of Education* (2008a), Joel Spring analyzed the following educational goals that the OECD promulgates:

- Develops and reviews policies to enhance the efficiency and the effectiveness of education provisions and the equity with which their benefits are shared;
• Collects detailed statistical information on education systems, including measures of the competence levels of individuals;
• Reviews and analyzes policies related to aid provided by OECD members for expansion of education and training in developing nations (Spring, 2008a, p. 65)

The OECD's discourse on education consistently emphasizes efficiency, competence, and economic development, all of which reflect its role as a neoliberal institution. This is also evidenced in Sellar and Lingard’s (2013) study, which consisted of an interview of thirty-three past and present personnel from the OECD. One participant openly expressed the OECD’s aims to “have ‘the broadest possible picture of the global talent pool’ and to provide PISA as ‘an open metric that people can subscribe to as they wish’” (p. 927).

A review of relevant literature and studies on the OECD’s goals of education shows that the organization does not align with goals associated with equity, social justice, and inclusive education. Inclusive education driven by neoliberal goals is oriented toward the efficient use and production of the students that could fulfill economic policy imperatives. Ultimately, it focuses on “a meritocratic perspective and the ability of the individual to develop and thrive within a competitive educational marketplace, which positions ‘education as an investment and not as a human right’” (Liasidou & Symeou, 2018, p. 160). From this standpoint, schools are regarded as sites for human capital development where the needs of labour market can be maximized (Liasidou & Symeou, 2018). Increased EDI, as this research argues, should serve as an indicator of progressive education, not for improved economic productivity, but for enrichment of cultural diversity, reduced inequality, and improved human rights (Spring, 2008a). Disregarding the discourse of social justice and equity reveals its reductionist understandings of schooling and pedagogy that ultimately promote a neoliberal agenda (Liasidou & Symeou, 2018).
Lastly, Rizvi and Lingard (2009) argued that policy is often mediatized, with the discussion often focused on public relations. In this view, policymaking resembles making media releases, as the marketization of policy and discourse is prioritized to sell and convince the crowd (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 19). In the case of the OECD’s PISA, the publication of PISA results and their relevant policy implications are indicative of such mediatization of education policy processes, neoliberal and neocolonial discourses (Grek, 2009; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). The OECD effectively utilizes educational data and academic indicators “through mass media coverage to amass political leverage” (Kallo, 2009, as cited by Shahjahan, 2016, p. 701). This critical viewpoint positions this research to speculate whether the OECD’s EDI initiatives are published to marketize its overall educational programs and policies to appear more inclusive, possibly as a response to criticisms regarding its neoliberal education agendas.

2.6. Summary

The literature review covered the ongoing trends of globalization and internationalization of education. It established the two primary theoretical frameworks of neoliberalism and neocolonialism, which will serve as recurring themes in the subsequent analysis of the OECD’s approach to EDI in global education. Additionally, this chapter introduced terms, such as neoliberal coloniality and neoliberal equity, which highlight the complex ideologies shaping equitable education policies. The selected literature offered valuable insights into international organizations like the OECD in understanding its underlying motivations and justification for capitalist and colonial pursuits in its development of inclusive educational programs and curricula. Informed by the literature presented in this chapter, this research examines how a practical reform for EDI should incorporate strategies that critically engage with and challenge the prevailing norms of capitalism and colonialism (Bourassa, 2021). This involves an in-depth
examination and understanding of the historical trajectories that have shaped, and continue to influence, the current state of education systems.

In the next chapter, I explore the methods and methodologies employed to conduct a textual analysis of the OECD's TIC document. Concepts and frameworks introduced in this chapter are applied in understanding how the discursive strategies employed by the OECD in its TIC report demonstrate the organization’s intents for informing policies and curricula that would enhance EDI and promote inclusive education.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction of methods and methodology

In this chapter, I discuss the research methodology and specific methods used to analyze the discourses within the OECD’s TIC document. Methodologies used together are Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Michel Foucault’s discourse analysis on power. This combination of discourse analysis allows for an examination of the document's language, particularly on the organization's use of discourse to navigate the conflicting ideals of neoliberalism and inclusive education. Employing CDA most appropriately serves the purpose of this research, which aims to highlight how the OECD bridges the conflicting ideals of neoliberalism and inclusive education. CDA also engages with understanding the text at a more abstract and structural level, allowing for a broader analysis of texts in the relevant sociopolitical contexts (Fairclough, 2003). In essence, Fairclough’s methodology of CDA allowed me to conduct a textual analysis, whereas Foucault’s methodology of discourse analysis led me to understand the text and the production of text in relation to the theories of neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and neoliberal coloniality.

Through CDA, I delve deeper into the underlying assumptions and values reflected in the OECD’s discourse of EDI in its document titled *Adapting Curriculum to Bridge Equity Gaps: Towards an Inclusive Curriculum* (2021). The TIC proposes several approaches to curriculum designs for equity-deserving students, including digital curricula, personalized curricula, and flexible curricula. Broadly, these specialized types of curricula should increase educational efficacy in resource allocation and provide better support for equity-deserving students in their learning processes. However, the OECD's advocacy for competency-based and comparative education faces numerous difficulties in bridging their conflicting values. Overall, the OECD’s
discussion on inclusive education embodies neocolonial approaches and neoliberal goals and insufficiently addresses the cultural differences across all nations. As many countries studied in their EDI policy do not share similar education and political systems, a discourse analysis is necessary in evaluating how the development of a universal curriculum tends to homogenize education systems worldwide. Consequently, studying the discursive strategies used in the document is effective in recognizing the OECD’s broader goals as a global economic organization and observing the manifestations of power evident in text. This research sheds light on how the contrasting aims of economic development and inclusive education are reflected in their discourse. Through CDA, the research highlights the OECD’s neoliberal and neocolonial approaches and influences on its EDI reform strategies.

In the subsequent sections, I provide an overview of CDA and Foucauldian discourse analysis as well as their respective strengths and limitations. I then delve into the process of data selection and elucidate how the methodology will be employed to address my research questions. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a summary that serves as a segue to the next chapter on data analysis.

3.2. Overview of CDA: Two approaches

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodology employed for sociolinguistic analysis of texts. This method is effective to evaluate the social, political, and economic dynamics and domains of policy and power. As this research strives to highlight underlying assumptions and how power is perpetuated within the OECD’s TIC document, the methodology of CDA best articulates such relations. It is a frequently used methodology to examine
educational policies, curricula, and other materials, particularly for their respective political implications (Taylor, 1997; 2004)

Norman Fairclough explained that each discursive event takes three facets: text, discourse practice, and social practice (Fairclough, 1993). This three-dimensional framework allows for the researcher to establish a connection between the identified discursive strategy in the text and a theory of power, and therefore, how the text represents the social, institutional, and cultural norms, values, and significance (Fairclough, 1993; Gee, 2010). In his book on discourse analysis, James Paul Gee (2010) introduced various analysis tools of CDA, one of which (“The Big ‘D’ Discourse Tool”) is to identify how the person or institution is using language in their given environments to express a certain socially recognizable identity for a specific purpose or recognition. Using CDA, this research highlights the necessity of qualitative analysis by evaluating the language of educational policies and programs. A qualitative analysis is crucial for addressing social problems and understanding how they are manifested in the text through its underlying context (Fairclough, 2003). Such context is deducible from the associated institutional frameworks. In the case of this research, CDA highlights the history and institutional goals of the OECD through:

the interdiscursive and intertextual relationships between texts, utterances, discourses and genres within a variety of different fields of action; and it pays close attention to extralinguistic, sociological and structural variables that limit or expand the range of discursive possibilities within a given context (Hodes, 2018, p. 74).

Fairclough’s discourse analysis involves understanding 1) the production of meaning as an element of social process; 2) the language associated with a particular field, social contexts, or cultures, and; 3) the world in a particular social and political perspective (Fairclough, 2003).
Fairclough emphasized that CDA is valuable for examining both the semiotic and extra-semiotic elements of discourse, involving a process of "complexity reduction" to achieve a comprehensive interpretation of what the discourse conveys (Fairclough, 2013). This requires a meticulous articulation of objects, actions, agents, practices, and structures as well as an observation of the relevant political, economic, and social contexts and theories evident by the discursive strategies (Fairclough, 2013). This approach to CDA allows the researcher to unveil the construed implications and connotations and identify their effects.

CDA draws on the critical theories related to power, privilege, and hegemony (Rogers et al., 2005; Rogers, 2011). Pennycook (1994) discussed the different approaches to discourse analysis, including those of Fairclough and Foucault. First, he described Fairclough’s methods of CDA to shed light on the underestimated significance of language and discourse and the social relationships, inequalities, and power they embody. While Fairclough’s approach is critical of mainstream linguistics in such ways, it is also overly shaped by a neo-Marxist perspective that views power to be “located in the relationship between social classes and economic production [...] taken to be primary (base or infrastructural), material, and causative of all other relations” (Pennycook, 1994, p. 125). As such, Pennycook (1994) cautioned against Fairclough’s CDA and its attention to ‘complexity reduction,’ particularly with regards to treating ideology as the primary way that social inequalities are perpetuated. In other words, Fairclough’s approach to CDA tends to over-emphasize particular statements authored in documents, and under-emphasizes how statements have been enabled, authorized, parroted, determined or ‘made intelligible’ by discourse. Stephen Ball (1990) made a similar distinction between these two broad understandings of CDA as he challenged, “[t]he issue in discourse analysis is why, at a given time, out of all the possible things that could be said, only certain things were said” (p. 3).
Pennycook (1994) further noted that Foucault’s connection of discourse and power is not necessarily concerned with how text reflects social inequalities. Rather, it focuses on the idea that it is discourse itself which produces and perpetuates textual articulations of social inequalities and social realities (p. 126). Moreover, Foucault’s approach to discourse analysis theorizes discourse as always/already political; it does not seek out an ultimate cause or basis for power and inequality, but rather focuses on the multiplicity of sites through which power operates; and it does not posit a reality outside discourse, but rather looks to the discursive production of truth. (Pennycook, 1994, p. 131)

This point is relevant to the OECD’s discussions on EDI and production of “the truth,” asserting the Western ways of knowing and learning are the only and universal way. As such, Foucault’s discourse analysis method is necessary, on top of Fairclough’s CDA, in understanding the OECD’s neocolonial endeavours reflected by the TIC.

Foucault’s discourse analysis considers three main concepts: discourse, power, and knowledge (McHoul & Grace, 1993; Graham, 2011). In this research, I also examine the power relationships and hegemony expressed through text with a reference to Foucault’s framework:

For, if it is asserted that the question of discontinuities, systems and transformations, series and thresholds, arises in all the historical disciplines (and in those concerned with ideas or the sciences no less than those concerned with economics and society), how could one oppose with any semblance of legitimacy ‘development’ and ‘system’, movement and circular regulations, or, as it is sometimes put crudely and unthinkingly, ‘history’ and ‘structure’? (Foucault, 1969, p. 15).

In addition to Fairclough’s (2013) three-dimensional approach to textual analysis, Foucault’s understanding of discourse analysis provides my research an additional way of identifying how the discontinuities and contradictions between colonial histories and the socioeconomic and political hegemony of the OECD are legitimated (Foucault, 1969; Pennycook, 1994; Curtis,
Understanding the power relationships in the TIC document aims to recognize how its organizational values and perspectives are reflected in its use of language, rather than simply relying on the text of the document alone. As such, my methodological commitments follow Ball’s (1990) important insights to understand how language and text are used as well as how certain discourses legitimate those specific uses of language and text in documents. Approaching the TIC document through both approaches to CDA (i.e., Fairclough (2013) and Foucault (1969)) allows this research to concurrently identify the power relations that authorize particular instances of text in the TIC. The two-pronged approach to CDA strengthens the textual analysis of the TIC in exploring how the OECD reconciles ideas of education inclusion and equity, while also maintaining its neocolonial and neoliberal stances.

An analysis of EDI and inclusive education must also examine the process of normalization (Foucault, 1966; McHoul & Grace, 1993) and how equity-deserving students are categorized for policymaking. The TIC document identified socioeconomic and geographic indicators to categorize intersectionality associated with six dimensions of diversity: 1) gender identity and sexual orientation, 2) gender, 3) ethnic groups, national minorities, and Indigenous peoples, 4) special education needs, 5) migration, and 6) giftedness (OECD, 2021). The document outlines other individual differences, such as students’ socioeconomic status, family structures, languages, geographic location, and low performance or under-preparation in prior learning (OECD, 2021). Most of the diversity categories are associated with the students’ social identity, which evidently showcases the organization’s views on inclusive education. Such categorization of students also portrays the OECD’s process of normalization—students who do not fit into its ideal standards of a “global citizen” are singled out for "correction" to fulfill their
roles as human capital. In evaluating the TIC document, particular attention is given to the normalization depicted in the OECD’s discussions of EDI.

In essence, the combined methodologies of CDA and Foucauldian discourse analysis is distinguished from the traditional ways by making connections between language use and the social, political, and economic constructs of the world and locating the power relation within discourse (Roger et al., 2005). Power is intricately linked with neoliberalism and neocolonialism and exerted through the globally employed and universal curricula advocated by the OECD. The review of the TIC document through a discourse analysis sheds light on the role of language as a main subject and medium for the OECD’s reinforcement of authority as an international organization over other countries.

3.3. Document overview

The OECD’s *Adapting Curriculum to Bridge Equity Gaps: Towards an Inclusive Curriculum* is a 112-page document which outlines the organization's future goals for implementing equitable and inclusive measures to enhance its existing education programs. While the document borrows the widely used (and contested) framework of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), it does not take into account the aspect of “diversity” in its discourse. Rather, the discussion opens with the comparison of equality, equity, and inclusion. This lack of consideration on the topics of diversity is also depicted by the imbalance of countries that were considered into the OECD’s research, along with the different levels of contributions made by its member and partner countries.

The OECD provides a list of contributors from forty-five member and partner countries, who were involved with the production of the TIC (OECD, 2021). For instance, Canada is one of
the most represented—perhaps overrepresented—nations, with most contributors from Ontario and British Columbia. Other countries with more than five contributors include: Australia, Chile, Estonia, Germany, Japan, Korea, Portugal, Sweden, and the UK. The majority of these represented countries are positioned in the top thirty countries in the world economically (IMF, 2023). Despite the variety of countries that have participated in the production of this document, a vast majority of economically developing countries, particularly nations in Africa, are not included. Although the document is focused on “removing barriers” and “reducing equity gaps” (OECD, 2021, pp. 7-8), there is a disproportionate representation and contribution of nations worldwide, leading to a skewed dataset that impacts the OECD’s discussion of EDI. This preliminary understanding of the data sets firm grounds for conducting a discourse analysis around the framework of neoliberalism and neocolonialism for this particular research.

The document advocates two curriculum reform frameworks that are central to its discussions of EDI: 1) Design Thinking and 2) Universal Design for Learning. The Design Thinking model encourages curriculum designers to understand the challenges that students face in their perspectives using various data. The OECD states that Design Thinking embodies “human-centred approach to solving problems with a drive towards innovation” (p. 19) which brings together different approaches for multi-disciplinary methods to curriculum and pedagogy (OECD, 2021). Likewise, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that is widely used in the rhetoric and the development of EDI and inclusive education with aims to remove all barriers that lead to inequality. With these frameworks, the OECD expresses its commitment to addressing and targeting the relevant issues to close these inequity gaps. According to Foucault and a number of contemporary scholars (Ball, 2016; Spring, 2008a), these inequity gaps should be held responsible by international organizations that mainly consist of the
WEIRD countries, as their policies are what often leads to (if not accelerates) the increasing inequality gap. As such, while the document emphasizes the need for practical solutions to include all learners and “leaving no learners behind” (OECD, 2021, p. 7), the OECD’s approach to inclusive education is inherently colonial. This discussion expands in Chapter 4.

Beginning this research, I analyzed the document in its entirety. The report opens with an executive summary and key messages, summarizing the relevant research findings and implications. The first chapter collectively analyzes data available on different education systems and curricula from the member countries to draw on the importance of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) model. The specific sections to be analyzed are as follows 1) “Defining equality, equity, and inclusion in the context of curriculum design,” 2) “Design Thinking and Universal Design for Learning (UDL),” and 3) “What remains unknown.” Chapter 1 highlights certain groups that are either at an advantage or disadvantage from access to educational resources and different types of curricula in addressing EDI. The second chapter offers a detailed analysis of each country selected for case studies on EDI and inclusive education. Chapter 3 explores how the strategies presented in the earlier sections can be practically integrated into existing curricula. It informs readers of the potential drawbacks that may result from the curriculum reform in different countries by discussing the unintended consequences that have previously occurred.

3.4. Procedures for data selection

Due to the broad scope of the document, I followed the advice of Wodak and Meyer (2009) in my approaches and methods of data collection and analysis. Wodak and Meyer (2009) emphasized that, in CDA, data collection is not regarded as a distinct phase that must be
concluded before analysis begins, but a continual process throughout the research (p. 24). First, the process involved conducting a round of initial analyses, identifying indicators for specific concepts, expanding concepts into categories, and collecting additional data based on the initial findings. Following this approach, data collection was an ongoing process, and new questions continually emerged that were addressed through the collection of new data or a re-examination of existing data (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). This required reading and re-reading the specific sections of the TIC where I identified indicators of neocolonialism and neoliberalism. Based on these initial indicators, I established guiding categories to identify specific textual constructions (discussed later in this section). As the OECD is a neoliberal and neocolonial organization, I was interested in observing whether such organizational aims are reflected in the TIC and the organization’s overall approach to EDI in education. Locating where power lies and how it is expressed in the discourse laid the foundation for a Foucauldian analysis of discourse of the TIC (Pennycook, 1994; Fairclough, 2003).

Some of the categories I attended to are in the form of different inequities that the TIC sought to address through EDI principles and practices. The broader categories constructed for this research are 1) ethnic groups, 2) gender and sexual orientation, 3) socioeconomic status, and 4) special education needs (OECD, 2021). The document distinguishes student groups in several subcategories, which mainly fall under the broader terms I listed above. Dividing the text in these categories helped to establish a clear methodological framework for this research.

I filtered these data to focus on the parts where discourse best represents the theoretical frameworks of this research. In the TIC document, the OECD presents four types of curricula to be considered for more inclusive education worldwide: digital curricula, personalized curricula, competency-based curricula, and flexible curricula (OECD, 2021). To fit within the scope of this
research, however, discussions on the specific types of curricula were not analyzed for this research. Given the TIC's predominant emphasis on Design Thinking and UDL, I conducted a more in-depth analysis of the OECD's approach to developing these frameworks.

A preliminary analysis was conducted on the discursive strategies evident in the positive outlook conveyed through text, which sheds light on solely the benefits of each curriculum. This process focused on identifying evidence of the document’s equivocation between EDI and neoliberal and neocolonial principles. The TIC report undoubtedly considers inclusive education as a medium to improve individual, societal, and economic welfare. To understand how such a process of equivocation was established, I analyzed the argumentation strategies as outlined by Siegfried Jäger, specifically on argumentation strategies, form of argumentation, intrinsic logic and composition, and implications and insinuations (as cited by Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 25).

The TIC document is written with an underlying assumption that economic development is beneficial for all. This assumption, however, diminishes the exploitative nature of the competitive market economy upon which many WEIRD education systems were founded. The preliminary scan of the document identifies how the OECD naturally points to the benefits of EDI as a means of increasing educational productivity. Upon the analysis of these issues, I identify the OECD’s equivocation strategies which serve to reconcile the conflicting values of EDI with its overtly neoliberal and neocolonial perspectives.

3.4. Data analysis

In performing discourse analysis on chosen data, I explored how the OECD engages in equivocation by presenting data-driven analyses and implications for curriculum reform. In the initial step of Fairclough’s (1993) three-dimensional (3D) model, I identified key phrases and
sentences addressing topics related to students' educational outcomes and socioeconomic status, paying attention to the linguistic devices used. The document overall outlines how EDI can be incorporated into the OECD’s current existing curricula with quantitative data and analysis. Observing the discursive strategies allows for understanding the rationale behind OECD’s work towards EDI (interpretation). As the OECD relies heavily on the quantitative measures of students ‘academic performances (a major discourse in itself), the document at a glance presents statistically reliable evidence that supports its statements.

Analyzing the text at a deeper level, I was able to locate sections that draw on the OECD’s own dataset presented in the TIC with its underlying ideologies of neoliberalism and neocolonialism. This approach involves a multi-step process, each step narrowing down the analysis to focus on the details that contribute to the larger meanings and implications as a whole. In the following section, I provide more details on the process of data analysis using Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional (3D) model of CDA.

3.4.1. Data analysis: The three-dimensional (3D) model

In his Language and Power (1989), Fairclough introduced the three-dimensional (3D) model in conducting a CDA to explore the relations of power in discourse as well as power behind discourse. The connection that CDA makes between theories and discourses generally follows Fairclough’s 3D model: “description of text, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 109). Fairclough commented on coherence in reference to how the text is interpreted in understanding the world subjectively by the interpreter (p. 78). The 3D model, therefore, places significant reliance on the researcher's perspectives and their understanding of
the world with the theories to which they make connections. More detailed explanations of each stage of the 3D model are provided in the following sections.

3.4.2. Description: Analyzing linguistic devices

At the first stage of description, the discourse is reviewed for its broad linguistic components, such as vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures. This stage is conducted through the series of questions Fairclough proposed in his Language and Power (1989):

1. What experiential values do words and grammatical features have?
2. What relational values do words and grammatical features have?
3. What expressive values do words and grammatical features have?
4. What metaphors are used?
5. How are (simple) sentences linked together?
6. What interactional conventions are used?
7. What larger-scale structures does the text have? (pp. 110-111).

For the purpose of this research, I focused on the textual structures above all linguistic features (i.e., questions 6 and 7). Due to the length of the TIC document, I decided to begin the analysis by examining the discourse to identify power relations, as well as the relational and experiential values associated with higher-level organizational features (p. 134).

I divided the description section into two parts: syntactic and semantic analyses. In my syntactic analysis, I examined a section of the discourse that was repeatedly emphasized throughout the report. The semantic analysis included scrutinizing the verbs, verb phrases, adverbs, and adverbial phrases. Based on my findings, I argued that the OECD prevaricates addressing issues on inclusive education through the use of vague language and propositions. The linguistic analyses led to the second stage of my analysis, interpretation, which examined the
use of language further in relation to my theoretical frameworks. In the following section, the discourse analysis focuses on the specific words and phrases that recur throughout the document.

3.4.3. Interpretation: Connection with the theoretical frameworks

At the dimension of interpretation, the text is “socially” analyzed to understand the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption. At this stage, the analysis focuses more on the meaning than the technical aspects of the discourse. According to Fairclough (1989), interpretations are produced by “a combination of what is in the text and what is ‘in’ the interpreter” (p. 141), the latter playing the dominant role in the process. In other words, the researcher’s chosen modes of interpretation and the outcomes depend on the researcher’s resources and worldview. Figure 2 outlines how the process of interpretation was conducted in this research. In this diagram, Fairclough focused on the situational context prior to reviewing the intertextual context of the discourse. The OECD uses its TIC document to convey the benefits of inclusive curriculum for improved productivity and economic welfare. The report presents minimal discourse on its PISA standards and results as they contradict its pursuit for inclusive education. As such, laying out the situational context to understand the discourse before understanding the text’s underlying assumptions (intertextual context) is integral at this stage. At the interpretation stage of the analysis, the researcher should not only refine data for its relevant concepts and theories, but also conceptualize the selected theories to be applied to the collected data. The diagram below (Figure 3) illustrates this process, as explained by Wodak and Meyer (2009).

First, this diagram demonstrates how a diverse array of theoretical influences can be systematized. It is concerned with how the various methods of CDA can be instrumentalized and
applied to the texts for analysis. Wodak and Meyer (2009) explained that most studies analyze “typical texts” dealing with how the discourse would typically be perceived in social situations and problems (p. 17). These social situations, of course, are subject to individual, societal, and cultural differences and remain disputable matters. The circle portrays how the theories and texts interplay with one another. Conversely, the interpreter may choose a theory that seems applicable to the entire text and then apply the relevant methodology to understand the text from this narrower perspective. In either case, the state of interpretation is influenced by the researcher’s positionality, relationality, and reflexivity. As such, this stage of analysis involves selecting information from the text and drawing upon my personal interpretations and connections to the chosen theories.

Figure 2. “Situational context and discourse type.” Fairclough, 1989, p. 146
3.4.4. Explanation: Contextualization of the TIC document

The explanation involves studying the discourse on a broader scale, where the researcher attends to the social, historical, and cultural contexts portrayed by the text. At this stage, the researcher unboundedly makes connections with the relevant theories that cover the intent of the discourse in a comprehensive manner. The researcher analyzes discourse as a part of a social process, practice, and structures as well as its impact. Fairclough also viewed the stage of explanation as “a matter of seeing a discourse as part of processes of social struggle, within a matrix of relations of power” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 163). The researcher may highlight how the text and the theories concurrently and pragmatically impact each other in relation to the discourse’s interpreted social determination and purpose as well as on the results of social struggles (Fairclough, 1989, p. 163). This stage of the analysis is where I refer back to neoliberalism and neocolonialism to understand the overall intent of the TIC. The discussion takes a Foucauldian approach in making connections between the OECD’s discourse of EDI with
power (i.e., Western hegemony). In essence, this stage of analysis contextualizes the TIC document to its potential impact on the OECD’s current and future policies as well as policymaking and policy implementation at the national level.

3.5. Limitations of methodology

This research faces certain limitations. As the study primarily looks at the use of language and discursive strategies of the TIC report, the research inevitably takes a biased stance in its evaluation of the text. All analyses provided in this text are influenced by the researcher’s positionality, reflexivity, and relationality to the theoretical frameworks of this research. I argue, however, that such subjectivity is inherent and necessary to qualitative research, where the study reflects an individual stance on the topic. The primary goal of this research is to address the proposed research questions and critically examine the OECD's approach to inclusive education through a critical discourse analysis. Lastly, there are various approaches to CDA and Foucauldian discourse analysis. Depending on the researcher’s approach, there is a possibility in which the same data is analyzed differently and associated with contrasting values and theories.

In the current existing literature, there are several critiques on the limits that CDA faces. The theories and ideologies that researchers connect with the text are inevitably influenced by their interpretation of the data (Roger et al., 2005). This process is also linked to making nominalizations and generalizations in an effort to analyze the text to achieve the research objective. Poole (2010) argued that CDA may overlook the fact that not all readers perceive or interpret a given text in the same way, and the methodology tends to point to a specific perspective in a deterministic manner. Poole further commented on how Fairclough's CDA has limitations in addressing certain types of discourse in ways that may not be genuinely critical.
This methodology fails to read against the texts involving all relevant theories that are applicable to the textual analysis and reading into the underlying assumptions behind all possible discourses and arguments (Poole, 2010). As a result, the research is also subject to interpreting the TIC document in ways that guide readers to a specific political view with a selective focus on the text within the chosen conceptual framework.

In addition, both Fairclough’s CDA and Foucauldian discourse analysis are prone to overinterpretations and problematizations (Bacchi, 2012; Webb, 2014). As such, employing CDA has potential risks of excessive critique of the texts and meanings that may differ from the original intentions of the discourse. In recognition of this issue, I analyzed the document primarily focusing on parts of texts that evidently present the OECD’s neoliberal and neocolonial approaches to inclusive education. A complete interpretation, however, is simply not achievable with this methodology (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

Finally, I critiqued the use of transitivity of the document to derive data-driven analysis in the TIC document. As CDA strives to make connections between discourse and social theories, this research is also not free from the limitations of this methodology. Consequently, as the analysis performed on the text, there is a limit to which the researcher can evaluate the content presented in the document. Acknowledging and working with these limitations, I focus on the discursive methods, primarily the use of certain vocabulary, grammar, and semantics, in making connections to the OECD’s institutional values and goals. This research is an alternative reading to the OECD’s approach to its EDI curriculum reform rather than an evaluation of the discourse’s validity.
3.6. Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview on the methodology of this research and proposed using the discourse analysis methods of Norman Fairclough and Michel Foucault. This research combines the two methodologies which conveniently structures it from a micro- to macro-analysis of text. Discourse analysis also allows the researcher to conduct sociolinguistic analyses of texts, making it a useful tool for examining the social, political, and economic dimensions of power and hegemony. Fairclough’s 3D model of CDA divides the next chapter into the broader sections of description, interpretation, and explanation of data and delves deeper into the OECD’s discursive strategies of its TIC report. The additional Foucauldian analysis of the TIC connects the theoretical frameworks of this research at the explanation stage of the 3D model with the textual analyses conducted in the preceding stages (i.e., description and interpretation), focusing on the discursive production of truth. This analytical sequence helps uncover the underlying assumptions within the OECD’s discourse and elucidate its organizational objectives as a global economic powerhouse. In the following chapter, I provide a discourse analysis on the TIC as outlined above.
Chapter 4: A Critical Discourse Analysis and Its Implications

4.1. Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I present the discourse analysis of the TIC report and its significance. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I first share my findings from reviewing the TIC in reference to Pennycook (1994) and employ Fairclough’s CDA and Foucault’s approaches to discourse analysis. The preliminary analysis provides a discourse analysis relating to power and hegemony in the context of neoliberalism and neocolonialism. The analysis of the document is structured in accordance with Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional (3D) model in following steps: description, interpretation, and explanation.

At the description stage, I perform a textual analysis on each section of the TIC and examine the syntactic features of the discourse. Analyzing these discursive methods, I identify strategies of equivocation that the OECD uses to enhance its discourse on inclusive education. At the stage of interpretation, I delve deeper into recurring phrases and concepts that appear in the OECD’s discourse of EDI, which consists of its key points on inclusive curriculum reform. At the final stage of explanation, I draw on the relevant conceptual frameworks (i.e. neocolonialism, neoliberalism, and neoliberal coloniality) to establish connections between the organization’s discursive strategies and its overarching organizational objectives. A Foucauldian reading identifies where power is located in the discourse and connects the interpretation of TIC with the aforementioned theories.

4.2. Preliminary findings

I conducted a preparatory reading of the document and a general analysis of the TIC report. In this process, I focused on the entire document to take note of broader ideas that the
OECD presents on EDI and inclusive curriculum, policy suggestions, and limitations of the proposed curriculum reform. Notably, there was insufficient supporting evidence (mainly due to the oversimplification of data) on some of the policy suggestions. This propelled me to dig deeper into the overall argumentative strategies the OECD employs in reinforcing the validity of its claims. Moreover, the overall discussion of EDI and inclusive education lacked a detailed explanation on how its research-informed suggestions could be applicable to a diverse range of education systems and governments worldwide. These preliminary impressions are revisited in performing the CDA of the report in the subsequent sections.

The TIC document is mainly organized as the following chapters: “Executive Summary,” “Key Messages,” “Chapter 1: What Does Research and International Data Say?,” “Chapter 2: Challenges and Strategies for Equity in Curriculum Innovation,” “Chapter 3: Unintended Consequences and Lessons Learned.” Below, I present the overview of each section.

4.2.1. Executive Summary and Key Messages

The first two sections of the report cover key ideas on ensuring that “no learner is left behind” and informing how EDI should be explicitly discussed in curriculum design and implementation (OECD, 2021, p. 7). It is worthwhile to note that the idea of leaving no-one behind was a policy platitude from twenty years ago which paved the way for an unprecedented amount of neocolonial and neoliberal education reforms since (Michel, 2016). The OECD emphasizes the importance of “[m]aking conscious efforts to listen to student voice and ensuring their learning and well-being should be embedded into the process of curriculum design and implementation” (p. 7, emphasis original) as guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (OECD, 2021). As indicated by these sections, the organizational aim for
producing this report is to inform policymakers, superintendents, and teachers of directly addressing and incorporating EDI into their existing curriculum and pedagogical practices. In particular, the Key Messages section highlights the important takeaways for pursuing equitable education policies and the potential benefits that would arise from such curriculum changes.

The focus of these sections is on the ways different types of curriculum reform could be implemented in consideration of the equity gaps among various student groups. Although the document acknowledges certain challenges and dilemmas associated with these reforms, the OECD’s underlying goal is on the sustainable economic development that inclusive education could accomplish by narrowing achievement gaps. This neoliberal aspiration is expressed by the OECD’s analysis on data from various countries in the form of “lesson-borrowing,” discussed further in the subsequent sections. This is also evident in the TIC’s list of five main takeaways that summarizes the document’s key points.

1. Use Universal Design for Learning as checklist.
2. Change the paradigm of “learning and assessment” to favour the whole child and person development.
3. Expect both untapped opportunities and new risks in public-private partnership.
4. Avoid stigmatising personalised and cross-curricular content and competency-based curricula.
5. Do not underestimate the resources required to close observable and non-observable equity gaps. (OECD, 2021, pp. 10 and 12)

These points are consistently reiterated throughout the report for policy implications on inclusive education. I return to this list for a closer linguistic analysis in Section 4.3.
4.2.2. What does research and international data say?

This chapter opens with an introduction to the concepts of equality, equity, and inclusion in discussing ways to address students’ intersectionality and learning needs (OECD, 2021, p. 14). The examination of equality, equity, and inclusion is approached from the standpoint of policymakers, explaining how the “complexity of curriculum design requires one or more approaches to benefit the individual student, depending on his/her specific context” (p. 14). For instance, the insistence on the individual, rather than on the communities, has been a consistent trope in neoliberal education since its inception nearly seventy years ago (Friedman, 1955; Larner, 2000; Brown, 2015). Overall, the OECD’s research findings in the TIC necessitate eliminating barriers to learning and closing the identifiable gaps of inequality and “intersectionality associated with dimensions of diversity” (OECD, 2021). As a solution to these challenges, the OECD strongly endorses inclusion in curriculum design and removing barriers to student participation (p. 17). Moreover, the OECD’s evaluation of each country’s EDI reforms relies on the following indicators: presence of explicit statements of anti-discrimination and inclusion policies (p. 25), implementation of inclusive pedagogy (p. 23), flexibility on core curriculum content and assessment (p. 23), and incorporation of digital learning and resources (pp. 28-29). In reference to the four types of curriculum innovation, the OECD supports its argument with a diverse range of data from each country as examples of how such adaptations are implemented and endorses various measures of inclusive education to be applicable worldwide.

As suggested by the OECD, EDI in education may be implemented through various frameworks, such as Design Thinking, a student-centred approach that focuses on the “process, skills, and mindsets” (p. 19) as well as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a one-size-fits-all
approach that aims to remove barriers to learning (see Figure 4). In particular, the TIC significantly focuses on the UDL framework, which is designed to ensure equitable and inclusive education for all learners (CAST, 2018). The UDL guidelines are written for various stakeholders, including teachers, curriculum developers, researchers, and parents, who are involved in making formal education a more equitable space for students (CAST, 2018). While this viewpoint is borrowed by the TIC, the OECD does not provide its own analysis of the UDL framework nor suggest the specific ways it could be incorporated into existing curriculum (see Figure 4).

While the OECD supports Design Thinking and UDL as solutions for inclusive education, there is a noticeable gap between its recommendations and research presented. For example, much of the data in this section relies on self-reported information from government officials or independent researchers (OECD, 2021) rather than directly capturing students' experiences (with the exception of one student who was interviewed and had participated in the production of the TIC). This contradicts the values of Design Thinking the OECD advocates, as the data presented does not adequately reflect the perspectives of students. Additionally, while the data and discussion on the UDL framework set grounds for inclusive education policies, the TIC shifts responsibility onto the national policymakers in making their own interpretations and implementations. The absence of practical suggestions demonstrates how the OECD equivocates its discussions on EDI without having to be responsible for the issues they identify.
4.2.3. Challenges and strategies for equity in curriculum innovation

This chapter of the document discusses the OECD's prior research on curriculum innovation and identifies the current physical constraints impeding the successful implementation of its reform efforts. These constraints include "varying levels of access to hard and soft infrastructure" (p. 78), disparities in access to digital resources, and financial limitations. This section of the report is perhaps the clearest declaration of disparities in education.
worldwide. It is organized into four primary types of curriculum reforms, each accompanied by policy concerns and challenges, followed by successful examples from distinctive countries to reflect and adopt.

One particular section sheds light on the OECD’s motive on inclusive education. In addressing the significance of the COVID-19 pandemic, the OECD discusses the challenges posed during the document's writing in 2021 and states that the pandemic exposed and “amplified existing inequalities in the education system while providing an opportunity to rethink education” (OECD, 2021, p. 73). The discussion on the impact of COVID-19 on the global education system deserves attention for two reasons. First, it fails to address how the pandemic had deepened socioeconomic disparities both within each country and internationally (Fisher et al., 2022; Reuge et al., 2021). For a report on inclusive education, it disregards concerns relating to the widening gap of inequality, inadequately addressing the need for an improvement in the environment and the quality of education for every student. There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated challenges faced by students of vulnerable demographics and drove them further away from learning opportunities. The report, however, interprets the impacts of the pandemic as an illustration of how each country has experimented with new pedagogical models in response to the time when existing systems of learning had become obsolete. It is evident, then, that the OECD considers the pandemic as an exemplary case study to draw upon and develop ideas on future curriculum reform strategies.

Second, the report explicitly acknowledges that “at the time of writing, many fear the crisis could wipe out gains from policies that had been effective in addressing achievement gaps” (p. 73). This statement indicates that the organization's perspective on inequity is primarily concerned with resulting discrepancies in achievement levels and inefficiencies within education
systems. The overt focus on identifying the inequities of educational outcomes omits the discussion of inequities that disproportionately limit educational access and/or opportunity for certain social groups. As discussed above, researchers (other than those involved with the TIC) have argued that the introduction of EDI by the OECD is tangentially concerned with social justice (Lingard et al., 2014; Bhopal & Shain, 2014). Their claims critique how narrowing the achievement gap is merely rhetorical and is designed to maximize productivity and capitalize on multicultural diversity in an international context (Bourassa, 2021; Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017).

In addition, much of the empirical data presented in this section is derived from the OECD’s own research and reports that focus on its PISA results and the evaluation of various curricula (p. 100). As such, it is difficult to conclude whether the organization has referred to an adequate amount of research across diverse educational contexts to draw policy. There is a drastic shift in discourse from its previous student-centred approach to an achievement-based perspective on inclusive education. If discussions on assessment and achievement dominate the discourse of EDI and inclusive education, the reforms discussed in the report would face significant challenges in their implementations.

Finally, the discourse of feasibility lays the foundation for non-WEIRD countries to “re-colonize” themselves in the current neoliberal and neocolonial education policies promulgated by the OECD and its member countries. This re-colonization takes the form of “policy-borrowing,” where non-WEIRD nations are encouraged to refer to the policy framework that has been deemed successful in a certain educational context, and therefore, become subjugated to WEIRD nations (Bieber & Martens, 2011; Lakes, 2014). This simple approach to policy development is what contributes to its discursive method of feasibility, which is construed from the optimistic tone projected by the document. For instance, each type of curriculum (i.e., digital
curricula, personalized curricula, competency-based curricula, and flexible curricula) is presented with challenges and corresponding strategies (OECD, 2021, pp. 77, 86, 95, 96). These respective sections also provide countries and jurisdictions that have responded to each of these issues and serve as a guideline for other nations. Overall, the discourse on EDI is overly simplified, neglecting specific actions and contexts in which suggested policies could be applied. The lack of clarity in the OECD’s discussion serves as a subtle invitation for non-WEIRD nations to re-colonize themselves by adhering to existing education policies and follow the trend that WEIRD nations are leading (Lakes, 2014). In this trajectory of reform, Western hegemony is reinforced further. In the case of the OECD, the contributors of this document are responsible for directing changes that ironically reinforce the neoliberal and neocolonial ways of thinking in inclusive education.

4.2.4. Unintended consequences and lessons learned

This section revisits the key lessons discussed in the Executive Summary. It serves as a reinforcement of the report’s policy proposals, while also addressing the potential challenges and limitations. As a concluding remark of this document, the OECD states that “[i]t is essential to expedite the process of accumulating, disseminating, and circulating the knowledge and experiences of early adaptors of curriculum innovations so that the knowledge gaps can be filled as quickly as possible” (OECD, 2021, p. 106). The report’s closing chapter focuses on the imperative to keep up to “the pace of eco-systemic change” to “quickly narrow equity gaps” (p. 106), creating a sense of urgency to the issue. The length and depth of this discussion, however, falls short compared to other sections.
Moreover, the OECD concludes with the suggestion that the “concept of “resources” needs to be understood in a wider scope, including not only financial resources (economic capital) but also talents from all spheres of society (human capital), […] which can all be used to close the equity gaps” (OECD, 2021, p. 106). This statement highlights the OECD’s goal of governing students for acceleration of economic growth. The reference of “human capital” contradicts the OECD’s initial mention of taking a human-centred approach to inclusive education (i.e. Design Thinking) earlier in the document. Overall, while the document emphasizes the benefits of inclusive education, it fails to adequately address the potential downsides of its approach and neglects providing corresponding solutions.

4.3. Description of data

The analysis from the previous section of the document laid paths for this research’s theoretical frameworks of neoliberalism and neocolonialism. Preliminary findings above establish the ground for the description of data, which allows for a more comprehensive, in-depth analysis in the next stages of analysis. The following subsections are the beginning stage of Fairclough’s 3D model of CDA and delve deeper into the textual analysis of the TIC document. First, I examine the syntactic patterns in the discourse, looking at the sentence structures, vocabulary, and grammar to gain insights into the meaning-making process. I focus on the OECD’s use of verbs (i.e. modal verbs and verb tense) as well as adverbial phrases, as explained by Brinton and Brinton (2010). These linguistic elements contribute to discursive strategies, including passive voice and prevarication, which are explored further at the interpretation stage.
4.3.1. Syntactic analysis

In its Executive Summary, the OECD states that “equality, equity and inclusion should be more explicitly highlighted during curriculum design and implementation phases” (OECD, 2021, p. 7), suggesting its current measures and education policies worldwide fail to meet such standards. In addressing this issue, the OECD asserts five definitive measures to summarize the research:

1. Use Universal Design for Learning as checklist.
2. Change the paradigm of “learning and assessment” to favour the whole child and person development.
3. Expect both untapped opportunities and new risks in public-private partnership.
4. Avoid stigmatising personalised and cross-curricular content and competency-based curricula.
5. Do not underestimate the resources required to close observable and non-observable equity gaps. (OECD, 2021, pp. 10 and 12)

The OECD then suggests incorporating these goals into the four major types of curriculum innovations, which are digital curriculum, personalized curriculum, cross-curricular content and competency-based curriculum, and flexible curriculum (OECD, 2021). In proposing reform on each of these curricula, the OECD suggests policymakers, school leaders, and educators must be cognizant of these issues and be proactive in better accommodating equity-deserving students (p. 11). However, several scholars have noted that ideas about ‘personalized curriculum’ are neoliberal codes and jargons that are at odds with the normative definitions of inclusion and equity (Pykett, 2009; Mertanen & Brunila, 2021). Nevertheless, this list appears three times in the report, illustrating the organization’s emphasis on these guidelines.
The suggestions on this list are semantically vague. For instance, attend to the verb phrases in each sentence above: “use,” “change,” “expect,” “avoid,” “do not underestimate.” These verbs have broad definitions without a clear specification of action. Following these phrases are noun phrases such as "Universal Design for Learning," "the paradigm of 'learning and assessment'," "both untapped opportunities and new risks," and "the resources." These terms, indicated by the noun phrases, refer to concepts and theories that are broad and lack specificity. The vagueness depicted by these syntactic structures can be linked back to the discursive strategies of feasibility. This also leads to the lack of specific actions to be taken, which invites economically disadvantaged countries to re-colonize themselves within the policies of neoliberalism and neocolonialism constructed by the OECD. Likewise, these introductory sections fail to provide a clear path for a deeper engagement of the topics on EDI.

The overall issue with this approach is that reform is difficult to achieve with a broad and vague understanding of the various educational contexts and policies. As this is a report on potential measurements for policy and curriculum reform, the discussion presented should be on evidence- and research-based policies which should have been proven effective. Of course, these would be difficult to achieve as the organization’s aim is to design a curriculum that is applicable to all students worldwide despite contextual differences. In the subsequent sections, I discuss more on how the OECD's discursive strategies of ambiguity and equivocation further demonstrate its neoliberal and neocolonial values.

4.3.2. Semantic Analysis

The semantic analysis of the TIC document looks at the use of vocabulary, phrases, and sentence structures in understanding the process of meaning-making and the writer’s intentions. I
highlighted the OECD’s use of certain parts of speech (i.e. auxiliary verbs, modal verbs, adverbs) to analyze its use of passive voice that constructs ambiguity. Auxiliary and modal verbs and adverbial phrases impose conditionality and uncertainty, as they contribute to the discourse’s passivity and indirectness.

Auxiliary and modal verbs

The frequent use of auxiliary verbs in the TIC can be read in two ways relating to the matters of possibility and necessity (Brinton & Brinton, 2010, p. 167). In this document, the OECD specifically uses modals to achieve 1) attribution of responsibility (deontic) and; 2) propositions (epistemic). The former is used in its advisory discourse to policymakers and educators in incorporating EDI into their practices for inclusive education reform. The latter, on the other hand, relates to inferences, potentiality, possibility, and predictions (Brinton & Brinton, 2010, p. 167). In the TIC, The OECD particularly overuses auxiliary words, such as “can,” “should,” and “may.” The indirectness of the discourse is further intensified by modifying these auxiliary verbs exerted in a passive voice with the use of be-verbs, such as “can be,” “should be,” “may be.”

The display of passive voice indicates not only uncertainty, but also an intentional evasion of responsibility within its own discourse. In addition, the use of “will” verbs expresses hope and expectations as it positions the setting of each sentence in the future. The document uses the modal verb “will” to comment on the impacts, influences, and consequences (mainly positive) of the actions suggested. This approach to proposition indicates that there is no conclusive evidence that the stated outcomes will effectively occur. Instead, the statements convey optimism and positive anticipations from its policy suggestions.
Adverbials

Along with auxiliary and modal verbs, adverbials are also used to signal uncertainty and ambiguity. There are frequent usage of adverbial words and phrases, which Brinton and Brinton (2010) broadly categorize as the following: 1) adjunct adverbial, 2) disjunct adverbial, and 3) conjunct adverbial (see Table 1). In the TIC document, adjunct adverbials such as “often,” “frequently,” “constantly,” “rapidly,” and “sometimes” are used to specify time, frequency, and duration. These adverbs, often referring to the regularity and repetition of events, contribute to the concept's validity. Disjunct adverbials or sentence adverbs include “clearly,” “simply,” and “considerably” as outlined by the second column in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjunct Adverbials</th>
<th>Disjunct Adverbials</th>
<th>Conjunct Adverbials</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Often</td>
<td>• Clearly</td>
<td>• For example</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Frequently</td>
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<td>• Constantly</td>
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Table 1. List of Adverbials from the TIC report

These are also known as sentence adverbs, which express the writer’s attitude and manner. They may also serve as modifiers or indicators of the writer’s judgment of the proposition (p. 219). Disjunct adverbials serve as emphasis by the writer and add accents and gravity to certain ideas
or claims that the writer wishes to highlight. Finally, the OECD’s use of conjunct adverbials includes “for example,” “i.e.,” which express textual relations, link relevant clauses, and denote logical connections (pp. 219-220).

The document uses conjunct adverbs to derive conclusions or validate its arguments, mainly to present evidence-based or research-informed suggestions. In particular, there is a frequent use of examples (“for example,” “e.g.,” and “i.e.”) to specify their associated policy implications and exemplary cases from various educational contexts. Similarly to the function of adjunct adverbials, conjunct adverbials that connect claims with supporting evidence or examples reinforce the writer’s argument. Overall, adverbial phrases are optional modifiers (Brinton & Brinton, 2010) and provide additional details or conditions that specify the meaning of each sentence. In the context of the TIC, these adverbials are strategically placed to prevaricate through propositions, emphasis, and transitivity to enhance the logical flow and validity of the document's arguments.

4.4. Interpretation of data

The next few subsections describe the intent behind the production of the TIC by the OECD, using the linguistic analyses presented earlier. Interpreting the data required an analysis of recurrent languages and the relevant implications they embody. I also analyzed the patterns in ways the research and data were presented, as the TIC report contains several collections of tables summarizing key research findings that are relevant to their respective policy suggestions. Finally, the OECD presents potential challenges, problems, and other difficulties that its reform strategies would face, which are immediately followed by viable solutions. Through an analysis of its language use and the juxtaposition of problems and solutions, I assess the effectiveness of the OECD’s discussion and the overall implications presented in the report.
4.4.1. Strategies of equivocation

In this section, I present some of the notable vocabulary and phrases that are repeatedly used throughout the document. They not only play a significant role in meaning-making, but also place a heavy emphasis on ideas the organization projects. Prior to analyzing the recurring themes in the TIC, I first comment on the document’s absence of specific authors and draw upon Foucault’s essay on *What is an Author?* (2003). Foucault argued that the author serves as a “characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and function of certain discourses within a society” and provides ownership, responsibility, and rights of the writer that formulates the discourse (p. 75). Given the substantial number of contributors and writers that were responsible for the production of TIC, the report can be read as neatly re-circulating popular discourses without the attribution of responsibility onto a particular individual. Moreover, the discourses of feasibility and equivocation are vague but nuanced through a repetition of words and phrases that embody positive connotations. In interpreting the data from Section 4.3., I analyzed key themes that are part of the OECD’s strategies of equivocation and feasibility. In addition to the description of data through linguistic analysis, this approach to data interpretation highlights the document’s key points which are relevant to the theoretical frameworks that will be applied in the final stage of the CDA.

*Removing barriers*

The OECD refers to “barriers” as any obstacles that impose challenges in implementing measures related to inclusive education. The term is also used to describe any forms of educational inequalities that hinder students’ learning and access to education. The word “barrier” metaphorically indicates an obstruction that blocks the way of a path, illustrating the challenges students encounter in obtaining the necessary education for various reasons.
As Ferreira and Gignoux (2014) commented, there exists two types of educational inequality: barriers to educational achievement and barriers to educational opportunity. The OECD alludes to both types of inequality, highlighting the following concerns to be addressed by national policymakers:

- a curriculum that exists only in written form (for teachers with visual and hearing impairments);
- dominance of written and standardised forms of student assessment;
- a “one size fits all” approach that does not take into account students’ cultural and linguistic differences (OECD, 2021, p. 16).

To evaluate the depth of the argument, I assessed how the OECD addresses these issues in its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). With regards to the first point, the OECD stated, “PISA is not programmed to accommodate students who require assistive technology to access and interact with computer-delivered assessments” (p. 2) in its *PISA Special Education Needs Feasibility Study* (2018). As such, countries were allowed to exclude up to five percent of the student pool from PISA, which are determined by a qualified staff member to determine students’ “barrier/impediment to their participation” (OECD, 2014; 2019, as cited by Efthymiou, 2020). The OECD’s endeavours on improving accessibility of educational program are diminished by its failure to implement its own suggestions. Overall, the OECD’s discussion on barriers in its TIC could easily be countered by its own neoliberal and neocolonial practices of PISA. This argument can be extended to the dominance of other standardized forms of student assessment and a one-size-fits-all approach to inclusive curriculum reforms.

In addition, the OECD also acknowledges the following barriers to implementing inclusive pedagogical practices:
• lack of recognition of students’ prior knowledge and life experiences in designing learning progression in curriculum;
• a disconnect between curriculum content and textbooks and the social and cultural background of learners;
• any form of discrimination, systematic and cultural biases in curriculum content, instruction materials, learning activities, forms of assessment and learning environment. (OECD, 2021, p. 19)

In addressing these issues, the OECD recommends that curriculum designers should be mindful of student choice, engagement, teacher agency and student agency, while also encouraging the innovative solutions as well as an application of interdisciplinary design methodology, including Design Thinking and the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (p. 19). It is also important to note how students and parental educational agency, freedom, and rights are influenced by (Adorjan, Ricciardelli, & Saleh, 2022) and lie within the boundaries of neoliberal and neocolonial discourses of EDI. As formal education relies on numerical evaluation and competitive structures, students’ and parents’ choices are bounded by society’s standards of academic performance, which are designed to evaluate students’ potential and capabilities as human capital. In other words, the OECD’s proposed endeavours to remove educational barriers still operate within its neoliberal and neocolonial aspirations, rather than challenging and breaking the status quo. I discuss this point in the next paragraph.

**Knowledge and skills**

The TIC report emphasizes the role of knowledge and skills to refer to a very specific skillset. To understand how each word is used, it is necessary to diagnose the relevant context. The report discusses knowledge and skills in the context of vocational prospects and employability, aiming to broaden students' knowledge and skills to enable them to become more
informed global citizens. As explained by Lakes (2014), “[e]mbedded in such reformist discourse are a number of assumptions that confirm a global policy agenda targeting human capital development and economic growth” (p. 129), indicating the OECD’s emphasis on knowledge and skills to be a necessary component to the growth of human capital.

As Bourassa (2021) argued, the categorization of students itself is a repressive form of exclusion that manifests capitalism’s arsenal and a neoliberal tendency of inclusions. In this process, policies around equity-deserving students refer to an extractive and protractive rationalization that students are educated to become more productive forms of human capital by developing the necessary skills and knowledge that benefit a capitalist society (Bourassa, 2021, p. 257). As such, the organizational concern behind inclusive education is reducing students’ performance gaps with the aim of increasing productivity in the production of human capital, and therefore, accelerating economic growth. Another implication of these categories is the OECD’s negligence on the institutional and systemic structures that are designed to reproduce and exacerbate inequality. This classification dangerously categorizes students within the dichotomy of “normal” and “abnormal,” enforcing Western and neoliberal views that evaluate students based on their academic performances and test scores (i.e. PISA).

It becomes necessary to consider how these standardized metrics could genuinely inform one’s performance and contribution to society and how they could practically relate to “the challenges that young people may face in their future life as citizens, as participants in tomorrow’s democracy and as skilled workforce” (Sjøberg 2020, p. 45). These sets of expectations may expose equity-deserving students further at risk of pedagogical methods that pressure them into achieving unattainable goals that do not necessarily reflect the efficacy of the policy changes for equitable education.
The OECD’s discourse on inclusive education inevitably places burden on teachers and parents for improvement in students’ academic performances (Holloway & Kirby, 2020). As academic outcomes are often correlated with students’ socioeconomic backgrounds, the OECD’s initiatives on EDI consequently do not promote inclusion of students’ diversity and their various learning needs (Holloway & Kirby, 2020). As such, there is a noticeable focus on academic achievement portrayed by four different types of quantitative data as opposed to one qualitative data that conveys a direct student experience (OECD, 2021, p. 61). There is a gap in the OECD’s argument of prioritizing “the why (sense of purpose and motivation), and the how of learning (pedagogies and assessment)” (OECD, 2021, p. 7) from its actual focus on the expansion of knowledge, skills, and competency that are measured by standardized metrics. Moreover, much of this discussion is focused on educational outcomes rather than redressing the inequities of educational opportunity.

Consequently, imposing an expectation for equity-deserving students to demonstrate quantifiable results (i.e., increased levels of academic performance) reveals the organization's capitalist perspective on education as an investment in productivity growth. While the OECD suggests “innovations focused on student well-being and not just achievement are particularly needed” (p. 63), its overall discussion centres around the latter. For instance, there is a frequent use of terms such as "educational achievement" and "attainment," which are connected to the development of "knowledge" and "skills" relevant to today’s society (OECD, 2021). Although several indicators presented in the TIC (i.e. access to learning and quality of learning) can be used to inform students’ well-being in an educational context, they fail to embrace the social justice standpoint to reduce inequity gaps among student groups and across various nations, while also failing to address the root causes of these issues.
Access and accessibility

The TIC’s underlying view on education can be interpreted in two contradictory ways: 1) a human right and 2) a privilege. The OECD’s approach to inclusive education first revolves around the former, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (i.e., Articles 12 (respect for the views of the child), 24 (health and health services) and 28 (right to education)) (OECD, 2021, p. 7). Increasing the accessibility and ensuring children’s right to education involves “removing barriers” as mentioned in the previous section, such as increasing the distribution of textbook and other resources (p. 23), improving affordability of e-textbook and other relevant costs of education (p. 63), and providing more assistance for special education needs students (p. 87).

The correlation of accessibility and barriers brings the argument to the second point, considering educational access as a form of privilege. For instance, the OECD refers to its PISA data to demonstrate how an equitable resource allocation leads to students with a “greater chance to succeed” as demonstrated by an increased national average of mathematics score with greater equality of resources between socioeconomically advantaged and disadvantaged schools (p. 44). These data exemplify various facets of how education is a privilege that is correlated with students’ (and their families’) socioeconomic status.

Considering the data presented, increasing accessibility overall is proven to be a costly process. Yet, an explanation of how a more efficient allocation of funding could be achieved is minimally provided. The countries discussed in the TIC’s discussion of educational accessibility include Wales (United Kingdom) (p. 90), Finland (pp. 92 and 94), Norway (pp. 92-93) and Ireland (pp. 84 and 92), which rank among the top thirty countries with the highest GDP per capita (IMF, 2023). Such limited examples demonstrate the OECD’s neocolonial viewpoint,
delineating how relatively privileged economies covet economic productivity and profit through education. Consequently, the policy discussions on increasing educational accessibility promote values of neoliberal coloniality through inclusive curriculum policies.

As demonstrated by the example above, the OECD provides solutions to problems that are mainly applicable to WEIRD nations. The non-WEIRD nations, who are largely excluded in the TIC’s research, are invited to borrow policies that have been evidently successful in “the developed,” or the WEIRD countries. The OECD’s approach to accessibility shows an underlying assumption that increasing educational access and accessibility alone suffices in fulfilling educational justice (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). The TIC expresses the idea of how a better-educated population is beneficial for the economic development of a nation, necessitating the increase of educational accessibility not only for economic welfare but also for social cohesion and justice (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 140). However, the reality of how education is often deemed as a privilege is not adequately addressed throughout the TIC, demonstrating how the OECD’s concern for EDI is less focused on non-WEIRD countries and their education inequity. As such, the TIC provides “a very weak definition of the concept of justice” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 157) and subtle promotions for neoliberalism, while failing to discuss educational accessibility in a comprehensive manner that addresses existing forms of barriers and inequity.

*No child left behind*

A notable example used in the TIC discourse is the phrase “no child left behind” (OECD, 2021, p. 1), which demonstrates the OECD’s imperative call to inclusive education and improved measures of EDI policies. The emphasis on the phrase of “no child left behind” suggests that the OECD shares common values with the United States’ *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), a policy
that targeted inclusive education as a medium to establish a more structured regimen of educational governance and surveillance. This policy is believed to have delivered three main results, which are 1) cultural monitoring that allowed for autonomic pedagogical practices under common objectives; 2) professional monitoring that allows for development of standardized pedagogy, and; 3) procedural monitoring that led to a dissemination of instructions (Michel, 2016, p. 519). The American education policy of inclusion led to a more rigid structure of educational governance under the rationalization of ensuring that every student is watched under standardized practices, emphasizing the cultivation of human capital as self-governing subjective figures (Webb, 2005; Webb, Gulson, & Pitton, 2014; Brown, 2015; Bourassa, 2021).

The discussions on changes post COVID-19 are heavily focused on developing the feasibility of the neoliberal and neocolonial discourses. This is exemplified by the OECD’s evaluation of educational equity via its PISA outcomes and data (OECD, 2021, pp. 42-48 and 56-59), demonstrating its quantitative and performance-based approach to inclusive education policies. Equity-deserving students, as figures of subjectivity, are targeted and prepared for employability. The practices of what Bourassa (2021) refers to as “productive inclusion” treat equity-deserving students as figures of subjectivity with attempts to equip them with skills relevant for employability (p. 255). This leads to a concern that international standardized tests like PISA merely capture only certain facets of educational outcomes and face limits to understanding the effectiveness of education systems and being relevant to the policies that address equity and inclusive education (Michel, 2016).
The advocacy for digital education inherently assumes each nation has well-established online learning programs, pedagogy, and equipment to be distributed. While digital education could be the solution to improving educational accessibility for some communities, this is a difficult goal to achieve as it is a timely and costly transition. Notably, a major aspect that leads to educational inequality and inequity is the availability and the distribution of funding. This view, however, is overlooked in the report. Often, the lack of attention for equity-deserving students results from an insufficient number of resources (e.g. electronic devices). While the curriculum reforms would increase efficiency in the delivery of curriculum, educational equity cannot be solved at each level of ministries, school boards, and public schools without the proper amount of funding dedicated to inclusive education reforms. The OECD emphasizes that “[c]losing gaps in digital competencies […] remains a policy priority for eliminating digital divides now and in the future.” (OECD, 2021, p. 32). Its advocacy for digitalizing education pushes for a public policy agenda that pressures students to adapt advanced technology, “thereby engendering normative assumptions that common core standards will raise the nation’s competitive economic advantage in global markets through product innovation with advanced technology” (Lakes, 2014, p. 117).

The digitalization of education may lead to a further division among the WEIRD and non-WEIRD countries. For instance, the OECD’s examples on how digital education has been leading to increased accessibility in formal education are only applicable to wealthy countries that have been readily adapting to recent technology and digital learning methods. Rizvi and Lingard (2009) commented on the idea of a “digital divide,” which could “extend the disparities between the post-industrial economies at the core of the global economic system and developing
societies at the periphery” (p. 154). In many cases, these economically disadvantaged nations lack the funding, resources, system, and technology to incorporate a digitalized curriculum. The OECD also addresses the “varying levels of access to hard and soft infrastructure” (OECD, 2021, pp. 77-78), “varying levels of home learning environment such as parental support and digital equipment at home” (pp. 78-79) and “budget to finance connectivity” (p. 79), to which it provides a solution of “equipping schools with the necessary hardware and providing financial subsidies to schools and students in need” (p. 79). This, however, is simply not attainable for many economies. While technologically advanced societies can increase accessibility through digital education, other nations are left to struggle with inadequate resources.

4.4.2. Presentation of data and examples

The TIC document presents various types of research, data, and information that serve as supporting evidence for the OECD’s claims and policy suggestions. For instance, Figure 5 demonstrates the OECD’s general approaches to EDI and how inclusive education is practiced in respective member countries. Each column provides various political strategies to inclusive education to ensure EDI is recognized and incorporated into the central curriculum in each country. Considering that the OECD collects extensive data worldwide, it is reasonable to present a summary of research findings for simplification and easier understanding. Despite this, the document significantly lacks explanations of how the data had been gathered and measured, how each category has been defined and established, and how the findings have been put together.

The OECD’s ways of presenting data posit discussions of EDI in optimism through simplified data. The footnote on Figure 5 states “[c]ountries with missing or not applicable values in all categories of the table were not included in the analysis” and were only included “if
data was available for at least one of the categories in the table” (OECD, 2021, p. 22). Numerous data presented are reported on behalf of the experience of the students with the exceptions of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Inclusion/anti-discrimination policies</th>
<th>Centralised national (core) curriculum</th>
<th>Support programmes/services</th>
<th>Local flexibility in content, pedagogies or assessment</th>
<th>Specific teacher training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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Notes: Based on available data from 33 countries/jurisdictions. Countries with missing or not applicable values in all categories of the table were not included in the analysis. They were included if data was available for at least one of the categories in the table and could be clearly coded as “yes” or “no”.
1. Responses for these countries/jurisdictions were submitted by independent researchers, not government officials.

Centralised national (core) curriculum: National curriculum in place to define minimum contents to be covered by all students across the country.

Local flexibility in content, pedagogies or assessment: At least minimal local flexibility in content, pedagogies or assessment to allow for a most relevant curriculum to local circumstances.

Specific teacher training: Provision of specific teacher training to support the implementation of personalised learning in school allowing diverse students to excel.

Support programmes/services: General support programmes or services accessible to all students including guidance, counselling and/or career advice.

Inclusion/anti-discrimination policies: Inclusion/anti-discrimination policies implemented on national or jurisdictional level to ensure unbiased and equal treatment of all students.

Source: Data from E2030 POC, Item 0.6.

Figure 5. “General approaches to ensuring equality, equity and inclusion in curricula” (OECD, 2021, p. 22)
Table 10 “Policy concerns and challenges regarding education during the COVID-19” (p. 74), Table 12 “Challenges and strategies related to personalized curriculum” (p. 86), and Table 13 “Challenges and strategies related to cross-curricular content and competency-based curriculum” (p. 95). The rest of the data involved responses from independent researchers, rather than government officials, school boards, and superintendents. The research questions, methods, and methodologies are also not specifically outlined. As such, the OECD presents simplified datasets that conveniently support its policy suggestions. Its supporting evidence, however, lacks detailed disclosure of how its data are collected, filtered, and analyzed.

4.4.3. Problems and solutions

Another form of feasibility is the discursive format of presenting both the problems and the solutions that are relevant to the policy suggestions in the TIC. For instance, the OECD expresses that one of the solutions to an inclusive education is digital education, which allows for a wider reach of audience and easier distribution of educational resources (OECD, 2021). In recognition of the various concerns for AI and digital education that have been raised in the past few years, the OECD suggests that these problems can be supported through numerous measures by

- supporting teachers and students to appreciate human values as well as new opportunities brought by digital transformation; ensuring equitable access to infrastructure (e.g. digital devices, use of e textbooks, print materials, online platforms); supporting parents to ensure good learning and well-being environment at home” (OECD, 2021, p. 8).

In addition, the OECD implies involving private partners into the curriculum delivery process despite the associated dilemmas, such as increased dependency on third-party digital services providers and/or subscription costs to these services (OECD, 2021, p. 8). On the role of private
partners, Ball (2009) referred to the privatization being a key strategy in education reform and a part of a “judicious mix” of political strategies among institutions, agencies, and governments (p. 84). Lipman (2014) also suggested that public-private partnerships are the very means to re-colonize education within the logics and rationalities of neoliberal governance.

The oversimplification of problems and solutions take the form of “policy-borrowing.” Lakes (2014) argued that discussions on policymaking involve broader thematic conversations on education reforms, reflecting on one of the annual summits hosted by the OECD and the U.S. Department of Education. Lakes (2014) highlighted how none of the national summits shared specific sets of practices that could be implemented across each distinctive educational systems, but only demonstrated the best-case scenarios that were effective in each country (Lakes, 2014). This led to the question: “Given the diversity of nations, is policy borrowing a reality in the context of these education summits?” (p. 124).

Policymaking through lesson-drawing (Bieber & Martens, 2011) requires drawing on the examples of other nations to solve domestic or international issues. Policies designed through lesson-borrowing could lead to obsolete or adverse impacts, as such a simplistic approach fails to consider contextual and cultural differences. This leads to what Bieber and Martens (2011) referred to as transnational problem-solving, where elites or politicians from their respective nations attempt to create solutions to international issues from such lesson-borrowing. Engaging in similar patterns, the OECD engages in “international policy promotion” (Bieber & Martens, 2011) in acting as mediators to advocate and benchmark best practice models (p. 103). The real issue, however, is that many governments subscribe to global agreements to work on expanding educational supply and quality but undertake very little action to attain these goals (Stromquist, 2005, p. 105). These instances of international policy promotion demonstrate how the WEIRD
countries substantially engage in an act of re-colonization, with non-WEIRD countries left to benchmark the neoliberal education policies set forth by the “world leaders.”

As an international organization developing its own educational standards that are widely referred to worldwide, the OECD partakes in a broad-scale evaluation of domestic policy performances and uses these results for international policy promotion. Webb (2014) discussed this convenient arrangement as “[…] the politics of problem formulation […] that […] creates problems for desired and ostensibly, already designed solutions, ‘manufactured crises’ and ‘inside jobs’” (p. 2-3). The OECD recommendations are arguably results of an oversimplification of the discourse of “problems and solutions,” which is resulted from overlooking diversities of social, economic, cultural, and political contexts of each country and its demographics. The OECD’s processes of problem-solving through lesson-borrowing refer to case studies from WEIRD societies, leading to further marginalization of the countries that are excluded from its consideration. Revisiting the concerns around non-WEIRD countries’ lack of political and financial support for additional resources, whether the OECD is concerned with inclusivity in a social justice viewpoint is arguable. As such, policy-borrowing is an act of re-colonization of non-WEIRD countries within the Western countries’ images of neoliberalism (Lakes, 2014). By encouraging policymaking through lesson-borrowing, non-WEIRD countries are bound to the capitalist ways of WEIRD nations in targeting economic prosperity for social welfare.

4.5. Explanation of data

This section connects the analysis above with the theoretical frameworks of neocolonialism and neoliberalism. As discussed in Chapter 2, I later morph the two ideas into what I have referred to as neoliberal coloniality. Referring to the textual analysis in the previous chapter, I referenced Foucault’s method of discourse analysis in reviewing the representation of
power evidenced in the TIC. The Foucauldian analysis allows this research to identify how power is perpetuated. This section particularly focuses on the OECD’s attempt to retain its hegemony in global education and how the TIC, along with many other discussions on inclusive education reform, portrays its neocolonial and neoliberal aspirations. In particular, the discursive strategies that present the political framework around EDI in education marketize the OECD as a benevolent organization, which would overshadow the global inequity among WEIRD and non-WEIRD countries.

4.5.1. Neocolonialism in TIC

Prior to my neocolonial analysis of the TIC, I referred to Bourassa (2021) in questioning “[i]nclusion into what?” (p. 254). The OECD’s means of bridging the inequity gap suggests an “inclusive” curriculum that assimilates students into the existing “white supremacist, settler colonial, heteropatriarchal, ableist, and capitalist contexts” (Bourassa, 2021, p. 254). In the discussion of educational reforms, policymakers often concentrate on the acceptance of diversity rather than challenging the status quo and the stereotypes that lead to asymmetric relations of power and discrimination (Stromquist, 2005). This is similar to the OECD’s approach to inclusive education, where the focus is on the celebration of diversity and providing policy suggestions that could mitigate the impacts of inequality rather than on the fundamental issues that lead to such inequity gaps.

A neocolonial aspiration is demonstrated through standardization of curriculum and evaluation, which inherently overlooks diversity. Andreotti (2011a) critiqued how a narrow view on equality, as expressed by the TIC, denies the historical violences that have passed on to and still shape the inequalities that disadvantage the vulnerable groups. Such a view fails to actively
address existing discriminations and neglects them to be “neutral, ahistorical, and apolitical categories” (Andreotti, 2011a, p. 79), while dangerously envisioning inclusive education as an oppressive assimilation of minority groups. In contrast, an expansive equality focuses on “the eradication of the present effects of historical oppression and subjugation” (Andreotti, 2011a, p. 79), which is necessary for systemic reforms to address inequity and inequality. A standardized curriculum, especially one that is designed to be universally applicable to all formal education contexts, naturally cannot cater to the diversity of the global population.

Moreover, the contexts that the TIC assumes are largely within its own member countries, most of which are wealthy Western countries. Excluding data from non-WEIRD countries, which suffer from extreme cases of educational inequity (i.e. countries with high Gini coefficient) weakens its discussions on EDI. A lack of data from less economically developed countries is a prime example of how education policies could lead to an increased inequity and further marginalize students who need such special resources and support. Consequently, “national education systems no longer are considered unique with long-standing history, sociocultural, and political traditions” (Lakes 2014, p. 129), as they are heavily impacted by policy advice from international organizations such as the OECD.

Despite its effort to recognize diversity of contexts and background in the TIC report, the OECD demonstrates insufficient attention to the international inequity in formal education and fails to address how to bridge the equity gaps of education for a more inclusive curriculum to be applied worldwide. Evidently, the OECD is indifferent to contextual differences and is largely concerned with the numerical records that indicate students’ academic achievements based on its own standards. In addition, enforcing the WEIRD nations capitalist values neglects cross-national diversity and homogenizes cultures in Euro-American terms (Moghtader, 2023). White
supremacy is enforced in the OECD’s advocacy of standardized exams (i.e., PISA) despite its policy suggestions for an inclusive curriculum (i.e., TIC).

The OECD’s PISA is a governing tool, which is utilized for disseminating knowledge and information about systems and fostering Europeanization in the current trends of globalization (Grek, 2009). In particular, the requirements of standardized examinations and fair testing neglect addressing local and topical issues tailored to each region, which in many cases, are excluded (Sjøberg, 2020). For instance, a research-informed curriculum that focuses heavily on the contexts of WEIRD societies promotes ideals that may differ from the localized curricula that the OECD promotes in the TIC. The OECD’s own definitions and terms of EDI and inclusive curriculum, as well as its independent data on education systems, lead to the domination of WEIRD societies in their policy discussions of international and comparative education and globalization under Western hegemony (Grek, 2009, p. 25).

The OECD’s classification of and discussion on groups of minorities also reflect white supremacy. The educational context the TIC describes is envisioned by wealthy countries that consider allocation and redistribution of funding within their own nations. However, how are non-WEIRD countries considered in comparison to the WEIRD countries that are included in the discussion? In non-WEIRD countries, where the socioeconomic disparities are even more significant among the rich and the poor, there are minimal political measures and interventions being enacted to address such inequity gaps (Stromquist, 2005). For instance, Stromquist (2005) addresses a concern that while the differences in educational outcomes among urban and rural areas are noticeably distinguished in most non-WEIRD nations, there is a lack of rural public policy which addresses this issue. The categories that consist of equity-deserving students as outlined by the TIC are not only written in the Euro-American context, but also negligent of the
different types of learners in the rest of the world, particularly in the regions of Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia (Stromquist, 2005). Evidently, there is a hierarchy among the non-WEIRD countries, as there are nations that are not considered into the OECD’s neocolonial vision of targeting educational equity as a means of improving economic welfare. The underrepresentation of non-WEIRD countries is indicative of the OECD’s negligence on the inequity gaps among nations. As such, if the OECD is genuinely concerned of closing inequity gaps internationally, it needs to provide more comprehensive understanding of the educational contexts in the non-WEIRD countries, as they suffer from more severe cases of inequality.

Overall, the OECD’s TIC reform strategies fail to assess its own colonial goals that enforce the Western standards of education globally and neglect the communities in non-WEIRD nations that truly seek international support to address inequality.

4.5.2. Neoliberalism in TIC

In The Role of Government in Education, Milton Friedman (1955) commented on the role of education in a free-market economy, describing it “a form of investment in human capital, analogous to investment in machinery, buildings” and its function to “raise the economic productivity of the human being” (p. 94). In this view, individuals are promised a higher return in capital and socioeconomic status that would otherwise be difficult to attain. The underlying assumption of a capitalist economy is that both the individual and the state benefit, leaving no one worse off (i.e. pareto efficiency). As mentioned by Bieber and Martens (2011), the “OECD’s concept of education revolves around an economic rationale” (p. 104) can be expanded by Lakes’ (2014) argument on how a neoliberal agenda is interested in targeting the private sector to drive education reforms. Sjøberg (2020) addressed a similar concern about how PISA promotes further “commercialization and privatization of national school systems” (p. 38), which would
contradict its advocacy for EDI. Regarding education as a part of human capital production solely prioritizes economic value and utilizes quantitative data to equate formal education as a form of investment for national and individual economic returns (Moghtader, 2023).

In the previous section, I commented on the mechanism in which students are evaluated for their worth as human capital and are expected to contribute to the economy upon the completion of their education. This view, when applied to equitable education, ostracizes not only those who are categorized as “equity-deserving,” but also students who are in non-WEIRD countries learning under education systems which lack resources. Such a neoliberal approach is subject to policymaking that invests in already developed education systems that would yield higher returns to schooling. Inclusive education, however, should not focus on quantitative indicators, but concentrate on a social justice approach to enhancing students’ experiences. For a global organization like the OECD, the policy and its relevant research should take focus on non-WEIRD nations and begin to bridge the inequity gaps internationally, rather than solely focusing on nations that are already equipped with a plethora of educational resources.

In a neoliberal perspective, knowledge and learning are valued for their relevance for the current market. For instance, subject areas in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) are increasingly preferred and valued for their job prospects among students and parents as well as for their market value by the government. This market rationality fosters a competitive and competency-based system that measures students’ potential based on the WEIRD nations’ ideal standards of human capital, neglecting social justice and equity and viewing individuals as economic subjects of governance.

In his essay, Friedman (1955) emphasized how a stable and democratic society can only be maintained with a “widespread acceptance of some common set of values and without a
minimum degree of literacy and knowledge on the part of most citizens” (p. 86). The OECD follows this ideology on a global scale to set a “common set of values” (i.e., targeting education as a means of improving economic welfare), which are systemically entrenched in neocolonialism and neoliberalism to homogenize, and perhaps unify, multiple education systems. In this process of globalization, equity-deserving students are inevitably neglected, along with those in non-WEIRD nations that are clearly not envisioned in the OECD’s inclusive education reform plan. Conducting this research, I challenge the OECD’s TIC in evaluating whether the organization’s proposed policies for equity and inclusive education are truly inclusive. If the OECD advocates social justice in ways that focuses on the equity-deserving students’ learning experiences, an approach to education reform that is majorly quantitative must be reconsidered.

4.5.3. Neoliberal coloniality in TIC

As explained in Chapter 2, neoliberal coloniality refers to the formation of the Euro-American hegemony through enforcing and reinforcing colonization and capitalism. Lakes (2014) described how globalization has benefited only the very few in the WEIRD hegemonic class and formed a “transnational elite” based on world capitalism at the expense of non-WEIRD countries. For instance, international organizations emphasize the importance of celebrating the diversity of learners, while also neglecting the reality of WEIRD nations dominating the current global knowledge system (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Various resources and curricula are predominantly offered in English (and often French), a language used by many Western countries. In their book, Rizvi and Lingard (2009) looked at how WEIRD nations can exploit opportunities in the information economy to reinforce their economic power and widen the gap among wealthier and poorer nations (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 156). In the perspective of OECD, students are considered as global citizens, or global human capital, who are essential to
economic development. This development, however, differentially benefits the countries and is far from being equitable.

By ensuring its role in the international economy, the OECD also renews the neocolonial hegemony of the WEIRD societies that exert social, economic, and political power over other nations. As it was founded as the OEEC (Organization for European Economic Co-operation), the OECD maintains its stance as an economic and political powerhouse in the international economy and provides standardized curriculum and assessment to determine education quality and outcomes globally. These measurements serve as policy implications and economic metric for human capital, both explicitly and implicitly influencing policies at the national level (Auld et al., 2019; Bieber & Martens, 2011). Education ministers and policymakers then benchmark these to reform their existing policies and enhance their global economic performance (Lakes, 2014, p. 118). The so-called soft governance and regulatory competition are achieved through the distribution of neoliberal ideology through PISA and promotion of competition (Bieber & Martens, 2011). This way, the OECD (and other influential IOs) aims to impact domestic institutional settings by comparing achievements across other countries, involving mutually adaptive reactions of the concerned states (Bieber & Martens, 2011; Niemann & Martens, 2018). The objective of an education reform is to impose regulatory requirements in a way that preserves and encourages the competitiveness of the national and international economy.

Formal education is increasingly being regarded as a form of human capital development and determinant of a nation's wealth. Although often neglected, non-formal education should also be considered in policymaking as it is not easily measured (Ismail, 2015). The impact of non-formal education is reflected on the social changes, redistribution of power, and the growth of democracy (Ismail, 2015), all of which are not reflected in the consideration of inclusive
education reform by the OECD. Instead, the OECD’s inclusive reform plan builds on the ideology of social Darwinism, which assumes the survival of the fittest in the modern economy. Education policies should not depend on self-regulatory political systems which rely on the mechanisms of free-market economy (Michel, 2016). Education policymaking in this neoliberal and neocolonial approach leads to a contest for quality, where countries compare and compete with one another to enhance the overall performance of their education systems by aligning with international standards and recommendations (Bieber & Martens, 2011, p. 103). Hence, inclusive education is deemed necessary as a “cleansing process” (Bourassa, 2021, p. 265) as well as a reform strategy that is not only portrayed politically progressive but also useful in exercising governance to “treat” unproductive aspects of human capital.

The OECD’s vision of EDI is not free from the influence of neoliberal coloniality, as evident from its Western, market-oriented approach to inclusive education in the TIC. Bourassa (2021) suggested examining the intersection of neoliberalism and inclusion may be useful in challenging educational policies, practices, and theories to assess whether the reforms call for true change. Understanding where the two contradicting values meet pose broader inquiries about current power dynamics, capital, epistemology, and the fundamental purpose and potential (or lack) of education (Bourassa, 2021, p. 256).

First, the intersection of these values lies at the aforementioned distinction of productive and unproductive facets of human capital, where students are recognized at early stages in their lives for their potential to serve in the economy based on their academic performances. Second, the neoliberal human capital policies both foster marketization and privatization of schools, which decenters power from local education governance to a global one (Moghtader, 2023, p. 4). As Lakes (2014) argued, national curricula with core standards were imperative to disseminating
common values within one’s economy (p. 122), which is now taking place globally driven by international organizations like the OECD. With globalization, the homogenization of curriculum and pedagogy brings students to learn the “international” standards, which are heavily influenced by Euro-American, neoliberal, and neocolonial principles.

Referring to Foucault’s conceptualization of power, Bourassa (2021) argued that power is exercised “not simply through violent forms of exclusion (negative power) but also through forms of disciplined integration (positive power)” (Foucault 1979; 1990, as cited by Bourassa, 2021, p. 257). Michel (2016) expanded on this concept to point out that the OECD in particular uses its PISA results to make policy recommendations to be applied at the national level (soft power), which can be considered as “global panopticism” (Lingard, 2015; Michel, 2016). This takes Foucault’s approach to power in understanding PISA alone dangerously addresses various facets of education policies, curricula, and pedagogical methods despite its limitations in assessing the efficacy of education systems (Michel, 2016, p. 517). Overall, while international tests like PISA can serve as useful indicators for education policies, its current level of influence on policymaking poses generalizations and assimilation of students into a system that does not consider the diversity and differences of each student. Consequently, an inclusive education reform informed by PISA outcomes does not adequately address the gaps among students as well as among different nations.

4.6. Summary

In this chapter, I analyzed the OECD’s TIC document using an integrated methodology of discourse analysis referring to Fairclough and Foucault. First, I examined some of the broader neocolonial and neoliberal discourses circulating within the document. Then, I studied the
specific linguistic strategies that contributed to an effective argument through syntactic and semantic analyses, particularly focusing on the verbs, adverbs, and other parts of speech.

With these findings, I highlighted the discursive strategies of feasibility and equivocation as well as the ways that problems, solutions, and data were presented. Expanding on these analyses, I established connections between the TIC with the theoretical frameworks of neocolonialism, neoliberalism, and consequently, neoliberal coloniality. This final step helped me identify the rationale of the OECD’s pursuit of inclusive education and observe traces of the OECD’s efforts on enhancing EDI for effective human capital production and economic growth.

I referred to various literature written by scholars who question how such human capital growth benefits nations disproportionately worldwide. The OECD is currently one of the major international organizations that dominate discourses on formal education and exert significant influence on national education systems, policies, curriculum, and pedagogy. As the TIC was written for educators and policymakers in implementing inclusive curriculum changes, conducting a textual analysis of the document’s underlying intent and belief was deemed necessary for understanding the direction of reform proposed by the OECD. In the next chapter, I conclude the thesis with the summary of my research and future implications.
Chapter 5: Conclusion and Policy Implications

This chapter summarizes the research findings and presents discussions on future implications and a concluding remark that wraps up this thesis. It comments on the analysis of the OECD’s TIC with scholarly references to how EDI in education must be approached. In Section 5.1, I summarize the research findings and revisit my research questions, methodologies, and researcher positionality. In Section 5.2, I provide future discourse and policy implications as advised by the academics referenced in this thesis, referring back to the research’s theoretical frameworks. In Section 5.3, I conclude the research with personal remarks.

5.1. Summary of findings

The OECD, as an international organization, provides policy suggestions and develops global initiatives that focus on the improvement of their socioeconomic welfare. This thesis examined particularly on the OECD’s aspirations to address inclusive education for improved social justice and economic productivity. As exemplified in the discourse analysis of the OECD’s TIC, students’ academic performances (i.e. PISA) will always serve as key indicators for policymaking in a society that functions around numbers. Ismail (2015) critiqued this approach to inclusive education with the statement: “education does not necessarily increase social mobility but can reproduce inequalities by providing opportunities and resources for those already established in the society” (p. 919). As such, there are dangers to the ways in which the OECD is approaching curriculum reforms for improved inclusivity in global and national education policies worldwide.

Moreover, there are various issues regarding diversity and differences in culture, identities, languages, and countless more that are not adequately addressed in the TIC document. Failure to consider multiple factors that impact the quality of education across the world could
exacerbate prejudice, discrimination, and exploitation of socioeconomically vulnerable groups. These issues are relevant to the concerns of educational justice because “it is in education that students learn to develop their sense of self worth” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 160) and educate themselves on matters that directly impact their lives. As such, this research asserted that an international organization like the OECD should consider education reforms in ways that are attentive to not only systemic and structural injustices, but also the individual differences that call for critical reforms.

5.1.1. Research questions and methods

My analysis on the OECD’s inclusive education policy delineated its values of neoliberal coloniality. In my introductory chapter, I proposed the following research questions:

1. What are the discursive strategies of the OECD's TIC project and how do they reflect and interact with the ideologies, governing tactics, and power dynamics of neoliberal coloniality in education?

2. In what ways does the language used in the OECD's TIC document mediate or otherwise reconcile the principles of EDI in conjunction with the assumptions, values, and biases related to neoliberal coloniality in education?

In addressing these questions, I first identified the discourse that the OECD used to portray equivocation, optimism, along with unclear presentation of data that may have omitted key details. This analysis was conducted with the research’s methodology, integrating Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Norman Fairclough and discourse analysis by Michel Foucault. The goal of incorporating two methodologies was to understand how the OECD’s discourses on set standards for what inclusive education should be, with its position and power as a global organization. As Pennycook (1994) emphasized, Foucault’s approach to linguistic analysis
assumes that discourse is “always/already political” (p. 131) and focuses on the multiple aspects and contexts through and in which power operates. Foucault’s discourse analysis complemented Fairclough’s CDA and allowed this research to engage in a more in-depth analysis of the OECD’s TIC, focusing on the production of truth through discourse, and consequently, the reinforcement of the OECD’s power.

Through these methods, my research led to a few notable findings. First, I commented on the policy implications that were dependent on quantitative measures, and often, the OECD’s very own PISA outcomes. I challenged this notion by arguing inclusive education reforms should focus on qualitative outcomes, such as student’s experiences or perspectives and teachers’ experiences on delivering the reformed curriculum and pedagogy, to mend the expectation gaps among policymakers, teachers, parents, and students. I also highlighted the organization’s failure to make a critical reflection of its current institutional practices (i.e. PISA). Although the OECD expresses its interest in the social justice aspect of inclusive education, it merely takes a soft reform approach, as opposed to a critical reform approach. This results in the failure of addressing the root causes of inequity gaps that are caused by the institutional practices of neoliberal coloniality, which are evident by the OECD’s advocacy for a universally applicable curriculum reform that focuses on quantitative measures and data.

Second, the OECD’s strategies of equivocation make its discourse on EDI appear to be benevolent, while expressing the aims of targeting equity-deserving students for assimilation into Western education systems. As such, inclusive education is framed to be beneficial not only for improved social justice, but also for economic productivity in the TIC. The research shed light on its relationality to neoliberal coloniality, improving expected returns to education and using inclusive education reforms as a means of targeting equity-deserving students, who often
struggle in their academic performance. An open discussion on EDI would be beneficial to the OECD as it would promote the organization as politically progressive while also impacting various nations in their policymaking processes with a uniform and standardized curriculum. As emphasized by Moghtader (2023), the marketization of formal education causes “downstream effects” for datafication, quantification, and automation in the production of human capital (p. 217). However, this approach is rooted within the education systems and contexts of WEIRD societies, and therefore, is subject to exacerbating the inequality gap among nations worldwide.

Furthermore, I discussed the OECD’s rhetoric in relation to power. The discussion around OECD’s inequity mostly focuses on the WEIRD countries, where the needs of equity-deserving students are addressed easily compared to students who are located in economically disadvantaged countries. I refer to various scholars who comment on such inequity in global education, such as Bourassa’s (2021) discussion on neoliberal multiculturalism, Ismail’s (2015) research on unbalanced dynamics of global equity education policies, and Rizvi’s and Lingard’s (2009) identification of neoliberal and neocolonial forces behind globalizing education. The inseparable link between policy and capital, as well as politics and capital, leads to concerns that policies around inclusive education cannot take a pure social justice approach. Overall, the document neglects the majority of the non-WEIRD countries that suffer from the most severe cases of educational inequity.

5.1.2. Limitations of this research

The integrated methodology of discourse analysis allowed the research to highlight the connections between the use of language and their analyses with my theoretical frameworks but also faced certain limitations. First, the research draws on two broad frameworks of neoliberalism and neocolonialism, both of which have been actively discussed in a plethora of
literature with a diverse array of views. Considering the scope of this research, only a select few were presented to support the arguments that were most pertinent to the research questions. As such, the research is limited by the absence of certain literature that could have extended its depth.

Second, the critical viewpoint of this research does not cover the full intent of the writers and producers who engaged in the creation of the TIC. Instead, the research focused on the discourses of feasibility and equivocation through an integration of Fairclough’s and Foucault’s approaches to discourse analysis. Pennycook (1994) denoted that while Fairclough’s methodology of CDA could focus on discourse types and the relationship between discourse and background context, knowledge, and theories, Foucault’s method highlights how discourse is connected to issues of power and is always impacted by social reality. Although this research aimed to bring together the advantages of both methods, it faces issues such as “the decontextualized contexts and the political quietism of applied linguistics” and the “reductionist and deterministic frameworks of CDA” (Pennycook, 1994, p. 133). This research is particularly limited by the latter, as data was read and analyzed with select ideologies, and is subject to overinterpretation and excessive critique of the TIC’s discourse. Consequently, this research should be regarded as one of the many possible ways of reading the TIC along with understanding the OECD’s current endeavours for inclusive education reforms.

5.1.3. Revisiting researcher positionality

Organizing this thesis, I considered various avenues this research could have taken. Within the methodologies of CDA by Norman Fairclough and discourse analysis by Michel Foucault, there are countless ways that a researcher could gather data and analyze the language based on their researcher positionality, reflexivity, and relationality. In my case, my past research
experience in discourse analysis and linear regression models helped me perform a qualitative analysis on a document that primarily focuses on quantitative methods. This project led me to consider how research in the field of education could bridge the gaps between quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and the right balance between the two. Conducting a discourse analysis on a report which aims to cover broad areas within inclusive education led me to ponder how EDI in education should be approached.

This research will serve as a milestone for future research in EDI and inclusive education, especially in my own academic journey. As someone who identifies as a Korean immigrant and scholar in Canada, my goal is to continue focusing on what EDI and inclusive education means in various educational settings, especially in both Canadian and Korean contexts that are influenced by neoliberal and neocolonial ideologies. Rather than approaching this topic in a broader context, I am interested in pursuing future research areas on unveiling the power and hegemony at play in a narrower and more specific context (i.e. regional or national policies). Concluding this research, I foresee my next step to be engaging further in topics of inclusive education within underrepresented contexts in academia.

5.2. Future implications

In several pieces of literature that have been referenced in this research, scholars shared insights on how these inclusive reforms should be viewed and occur. On the contrary, the OECD’s vague discourse and rhetoric of equivocation do not explicitly address the efficacy and applicability of its policy suggestions as well as the relevance of these policies to the values of equity and inclusion. This research posed various challenges that question the imperative of the OECD’s inclusive education policies. Root (2014) referred to John Dewey’s viewpoint on education, emphasizing that the purpose of education is for the sake of learning, not the
destination it takes (Dewey, 1916, as cited by Root, 2014, p. 72). Modern education, however, contradicts this view and regards education as a means of vocational training and human capital development. I argued that equity-deserving students should not be subject to quantitative academic evaluations that may misinform their learning progress. As mentioned, the OECD’s discussion of EDI is predominantly influenced by its neoliberal and neocolonial aspirations, such as making its own PISA tests more “inclusive” (i.e., increased participation rate for students with disabilities). As such, “inclusive” must not denote inclusion into Western education systems and capitalist societies. The OECD’s education policies on equity and inclusion are heavily based on its own PISA results and disregard its own “conscious efforts to listen to student voice and ensuring their learning and well-being” (OECD, 2021, p. 7). Despite the TIC’s efforts, a more student-centred and social justice approach that prioritizes the learning experiences of students is advised. A critical reflection on the OECD’s own educational practices is also necessary for a more sustainable implementation of its inclusive reform strategies.

This leads to my next point, which is to view students as who they are, rather than political subjects and human capital. Moghtader (2023) argued that instead of regarding students as resource for national profit, policymakers should take the capability approach that recognizes the diversity among people and attends to their conditions to life (p. 220). This approach allows for a sustainable and systemic change (Michel, 2016) and values the people and their place and history (Moghtader, 2023). In making a systemic and critical reform, Michel (2016) also suggested that inclusive education reforms take a structured approach with strong professional legitimacy, sufficient number of resources, and relevant professional development. Overall, policymakers must be cognizant of how formal education operates at a multi-level complex system, and there needs to be a “strategic communication” (Michel, 2016, p. 516), which
involves all actors and stakeholders early in the stage before any reforms or policymaking is discussed. By doing so, it allows for a direct participation of all that is impacted by the policy that are reflexive of teachers’ and students’ needs.

Comparative educators and policymakers must be cognizant of the inequalities in economic and political power and how it impacts education beyond the WEIRD countries (Stromquist, 2005). Should the OECD wish to address inequality as an international organization, it must address the social, political, and economic gaps that exist among and within each country. This approach to reform could only begin with acknowledging international diversity, understanding the different types of education systems and pedagogical methods that could be applied to each context, and finally, addressing the uneven and extractive power structures that favour the WEIRD countries. The WEIRD countries’ application of a top-down management style and a universal curriculum promote coloniality and may marginalize equity-deserving students further. Fundamentally, a one-size-fits-all curriculum imposes standardized assessment methods which pressure teachers into incorporating a “tracking” mechanism and assessing equity-students’ progress of learning based on their performance (Root, 2014). A universal curriculum as such naturalizes a single, capitalist, and Western approach to education, and arguably, to human existence, while also implicitly devaluing other approaches.

Finally, future research should consider how inclusive education can be approached in more critical, nuanced, and reflexive ways, such as the following set of recommendations proposed by Andreotti (2011b):

(1) a strong emphasis on the geopolitics of knowledge production in order to enable learners to face abyssal lines and work through their unmaking;
(2) a focus on the development of hyper-self-reflexivity, not as a form of hyperrationality, but as an opening to modes of being not anchored in (allegedly) universal reason;

(3) a pedagogical emphasis on ‘dissensus’ in order to support learners in the development of their ability to hold paradoxes and not be overwhelmed by complexity, ambiguity, conflict, uncertainty and difference;

(4) an explicit commitment to the difficult and ongoing task of imagining global citizenship education beyond both: ethnocentrism and absolute relativism; essentialism and anti-essentialism; dogmatic communitarianism and narcissistic individualism; and fixed teleological ideas of the future and ‘everything goes’ (p. 395).

A discourse on inclusive education must focus on the overall enhancement of students, particularly those in vulnerable and marginalized groups, in their learning experiences. The reason and call for reform must arise from a social justice standpoint that demonstrates empathy for equity-deserving students and addresses the systemic root causes of inequality in educational opportunities. Should an international organization like the OECD wish to solve the inequities in education systems, it must first address the existing inequality that divides the rich and the poor countries. International organizations should take a critical reform approach to inclusive education and consider the various differences in socioeconomic, political, and cultural backgrounds that contribute to the systemic injustices that affect the inequities within formal education. Considering this, an attempt for reform using a universally applicable curriculum lacks consideration for many economically disadvantaged nations who cannot afford to apply the OECD’s suggested policies to their current circumstances. A critical viewpoint on EDI reform would argue such universalism imposes a single (Western) idea and depreciates other forms of education.
5.3. Concluding remarks

Today, it is impossible to say precisely what we mean when we call persons forms of capital. Throughout history, capital has represented slaves, machines, animals, and property. How is it that in forward-looking democratic societies, capitalists and socialists alike, schools are focused on developing human capital? (Moghtader, 2023, p. 1).

Some may argue viewing humans as an economic component is integral to improving productivity and fostering technological advancement. While this belief has undoubtedly led to improved welfare across many nations, it also neglects to view humans as who they are. If inclusive education is regarded as an investment, what lies in the future of the targeted individuals who fail to return the profit the organization expects? Would the aspiration for inclusive education be continued until students meet the expected outcomes? How would students with disabilities and special needs be regarded in inclusive education solely focuses on the improved efficiency of human capital production? The normalization of the capitalist and colonial rationale behind viewing education as a means of human capital production makes it difficult to call for changes that are necessary in our current globalizing world.

In the end, such an approach to education cannot be free from the ideals of neoliberal coloniality, social Darwinism, and the survival-of-the-fittest ideology, all of which encourage competition and could ostracize equity-deserving students further. The discourse analysis of the OECD’s TIC report analyzed its neoliberal and neocolonial ambitions that aim to homogenize international education and economy through the expansion of its global hegemonic role. I conclude this thesis in hopes of encouraging various states worldwide to celebrate their unique education systems, identify how they could better include and support students, and lead a
student-centred approach to policymaking and curriculum development that questions, if not seeks to break free from, the current structures of neoliberal coloniality.
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