The debate on intergovernmental organisations and adult learning and education policies: intersections between the political and scientific fields

Licínio C. Lima, Paula Guimarães & Borut Mikulec

Published online: 28 Aug 2022.

Submit your article to this journal ↗

Article views: 278

View related articles ↗

View Crossmark data ↗

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The debate on intergovernmental organisations and adult learning and education policies: intersections between the political and scientific fields

Licínio C. Lima [a], Paula Guimarães [b] and Borut Mikulec [c]

aInstitute of Education, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal; bInstituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal; cDepartment of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the scientific debate that has been held in the *International Journal of Lifelong Education* (IJLE) over the past four decades concerning intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) and adult learning and education (ALE) policies. Drawing upon a field-analytical perspective comprising the political and scientific fields, this discussion is based on a systematic literature review of published articles in the IJLE and qualitative content analysis. The main findings stress the relative autonomy of the scientific subfield of ALE; however, the need to strengthen critical reflection to avoid interpretative perspectives imposed by IGOs' policy discourses and concepts is also emphasised.

Introduction

The *International Journal of Lifelong Education* (IJLE) is one of the leading international journals in the field of adult learning and education[1] (ALE; Fejes & Nylander, 2019, p. 106). For this reason, an analysis of the continuities and discontinuities of the discussions presented by published articles in the IJLE can represent an important step in understanding what have been considered to be important topics, theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches in ALE. This analysis can show how the debate on specific topics has been held by the research community in ALE and how knowledge in this field has changed over the years. With the four-decade commemoration of the IJLE (cf., Holford et al., 2021), it is important to reflect upon these continuities and discontinuities, namely those regarding the intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) within ALE that have been of significant relevance in policy, particularly after World War II. The IGOs we are referring to are the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE). In previous studies, in an effort to comprehend their relevance in global ALE policies, as well as the influence of such discourses on national policies, the authors of the current article have debated IGOs' discourses (among others, Guimarães & Mikulec, 2021; Lima, 2007, 2012; Lima & Guimarães, 2011; Mikulec, 2021). The authors showed and emphasised the following: (a) ALE policy has become internationalised and a product of IGOs that strives to promote precisely defined discourses and policies in the ALE field (although their formal mandate is generally limited); (b) ALE policy is increasingly integrated into complex relationships between the supranational and national levels, specifically as an exchange of policies between global networks of agents, ideas and practices; (c) IGOs are promoting policy transfer towards evidence-based

educational practices, a measurement of the effectiveness of education and the goals relating to competitiveness and employability in the twenty-first century; and (d) IGOs promote new instruments and practices of governance based on knowledge and data generation, peer learning, benchmarks, indicators, monitoring, evaluation and funding, with these being directed at output governance models and linked to the new public management discourse and its concepts of accountability, performativity, efficiency and other managerialist dimensions.

Following these previous debates, the current article examines two main research questions: (a) how research in ALE has evolved since 1982, which is when the IJLE was first published, up until 2020, specifically in how that research concerns policy discourses and concepts referring to IGOs, and (b) the impact of IGOs as part of the political field of power – with IGOs' policy agendas, social problems and solutions – on the research agendas of ALE, here as expressed in the examined *corpus* of papers.

These questions must be framed by the understanding that the research on ALE policies produced in academic articles published in the IJLE necessarily implies a relationship between the two fields, as defined by Bourdieu in broader terms (Bourdieu, 1994, 1997): the *political field*, comprising important IGOs, and the *academic field*, which is specifically the intellectual and scientific subfield of ALE,[2] of which the selected articles of the IJLE are a single expression.

The current article is structured as follows: Bourdieu's concepts of 'field' and 'relative autonomy' are approached to theoretically guide the present research and support the interpretation of data; methods and sources of the research conducted are then addressed; the results are presented and data interpreted; and, finally, some conclusions are presented.

Political and scientific fields in ALE

Bourdieu's field theory assumes that the social world comprises different and relatively autonomous microcosms: the religious field, the economic field, the political field, the scientific field and so forth. However, the definition of field is complex, and its use is dispersed throughout the different texts of Bourdieu's extensive work (among others, Bourdieu, 1994, 1997). This is why, from the fundamental elements that constitute a social field, and according to the excellent synthesis presented by Lahire et al. (2017, pp. 64–66), we highlight a few key elements.

Each field, like a microcosm, is included in the social macrocosm and has specific rules and social interests that are also specific and not reducible to economic interests. Each field is a structured social space in which the practices and strategies of the agents who occupy positions within that system take place. Each field is necessarily different from the others, though not homogeneous; instead, each field is a space of the struggles and competitions between different agents and their different positions and hierarchies in view of their appropriation of the specific capital of that field (social capital, cultural capital, economic capital, symbolic capital, etc.; Bourdieu, 1994, 1997).

Because both the political and scientific fields have relative autonomy, they are arenas of struggle. There are often close relationships between their respective agents, namely through interchangeable positions and cross-influences. Therefore, bearing in mind Bourdieu's theoretical framework, ALE may be defined as a social microcosm of research and, eventually, as a scientific subfield. In any case, how does the political and power fields of IGOs influence the scientific agendas of the selected articles under study? Are there signs of the overdetermination of political issues on academic agendas? The research problems assumed in the analysed articles may be affected by social problems because the latter are defined by the political field of ALE and by the actions of the respective IGOs. Do the political discourses, key concepts, social problems and solutions proposed or implied in the texts produced by IGOs tend to be reproduced in the analysed articles, or are they instead taken as the objects of analysis and questioning from scientific references?

The political and social problems as defined by IGOs tend to be accepted, legitimised and reproduced through the scientific practices of authors. However, scientific productions can also reveal what Bourdieu (1994, p. 61) called a 'translation effect' or 'coefficient of refraction',

preventing the direct and immediate expression of the political world in the world of science. Furthermore, despite the relevance of texts produced by the political field and other discursive productions originating from institutional powers, texts are not necessarily the beginning and end of social research. It is also important to consider the study of the contexts of production and reception of these texts, legislation, recommendations, management injunctions, decisions, strategies and other actions. According to Bourdieu (1997), the intermediation between texts and contexts is what makes it possible, here through the analytical emergence of a social universe he designated as a social field, to overcome a dichotomous perspective. It is then important to reflect on the following: between the extremes of a science in a 'pure' state and a science totally subordinated to political and economic requirements, or when just reflecting on other structural changes, do the scientific productions published in a specific journal show some capacity to refract external pressures, thus confirming a certain relative autonomy? What different degrees of autonomy/heteronomy (Bourdieu, 1994) are assumed by scientific agents in the articles undergoing analysis through the use of theoretical, conceptual and methodological resources?

The analysis of scientific productions can also allow for the identification of strategies of resistance on the part of researchers in relation to the dominant political discourses and actions regarding ALE, as well as resistance to the political definitions of ALE problems and priorities that are considered legitimate at a given historical moment. However, if the analysis considers the low scientific capital (e.g. in terms of recognition, status and appreciation) that can be held by academic agents of ALE compared with other scientific subfields and compared with political agents, a greater centrality of IGOs may occur, which can result in a sort of imposition of an interpretive perspective. This can be observed after analysing a specific *corpus* of articles, namely through the centrality attributed to political agendas, to the language used, to the concepts summoned, to the rationale and to the arguments that justify certain measures and political programmes and to fashionable statements and other *topoi* in the literature. In this case, there would be fewer arguments to consider regarding how ALE may constitute a scientific subfield and more reasons to talk about heteronomy instead of relative autonomy in that specific microcosm.

Within one given scientific journal, articles that address IGOs and ALE have been analysed. One may find the scientific discourse that characterises the *homo academicus* (Bourdieu, 1984) if this discourse is absent or if it presents high hybridity because of the influence of other social fields. This is certainly a relevant result.

Methods and sources

For the purpose of the current research, we conducted a systematic literature review, which can be defined as the analysis, critical evaluation and synthesis of existing knowledge to be considered for a research problem, here based on different texts, concepts, theories, arguments and interpretations relevant to the development of a particular theoretical frame of reference and/or use of a specific methodology (Hart, 2018, pp. 3–4). In line with this, we searched in international online databases for IJLE articles published since 1982 – CrossRef, ProQuest, Taylor and Francis and Google Scholar – to address our main research problem, that is, the influence of the political field of the IGOs on the scientific agendas of the selected ALE articles and the capacity of the scientific production of the published articles in the IJLE to refract IGOs' pressures and show a certain degree of relative autonomy of the scientific subfield of ALE. We examined titles, keywords and abstracts used combinations of several key terms related to the following five search categories: (a) UNESCO, (b) OECD, (c) EU, (d) CoE and (e) international organisations (IOs). Based on our previous research (Mikulec, 2021, p. 41), in which we identified the key concepts (key terms) used by these IGOs, our search was conducted using the following keywords: 'permanent education' (*éducation permanente*), 'lifelong education', 'learning throughout life', 'lifelong learning' (LLL), 'recurrent education', 'skill development' (or 'formation'), 'adult education', 'adult learning', 'learning society', 'sustainable development', 'upskilling pathways', 'adult education policy', 'adult

learning policy' and 'LLL policy'. Moreover, in the case of UNESCO, when conducting a search with the given keywords, we also included publications in which direct references were made in the published abstracts to the 'Faure' and/or 'Delors' reports and to the 'origins' of LLL, while in the case of the EU, we did the same when direct references were made to 'Europe', 'European' and/or 'European Commission'. In this way, we were able to cover a wider range of potentially relevant articles for further analysis. In the articles published in the IJLE before 1991, which were mostly without abstracts, we analysed the 'first page preview', which served as an 'abstract' screening.

The initial search yielded 62 publications. To be included in the review, a publication needed to meet the following criteria: (a) must have been published in the IJLE, (b) be an article, (c) published between 1982 and 2020 and (d) have a title, keywords and/or abstract revealing that the article covered at least one combination of the selected search category (IGO) and keyword. From the first round of screening, 31 of the 62 publications were identified as highly relevant to our research topic. These 31 studies were then read and screened based on two screening questions: (1) Does this study discuss the ALE (and/or lifelong education) policies of the selected IGOs? (2) Does this study analyse IGOs' policies through theoretical and methodological frameworks? In total, 19 articles were selected and included in the document *corpus*. These are shown in Table 1, which are presented in chronological order regarding the information presented: article's publication year; author(s); article's title; research questions and objectives; theoretical orientation; research methodology; IGOs' concepts addressed; and IGOs' policies discussed.

A qualitative research approach was used. The research involved a content analysis (Drisco & Maschi, 2015) of the selected articles. The categories of analysis were developed *a priori*, drawing on Bourdieu's (1984, 1994, 1997) theoretical understanding of a scientific field and its connections with the political field, here considering a previous application of his work in the subfield of ALE (Rubenson & Elfert, 2015). These categories included the following: (1) articles' research questions and articles' objectives (IGOs addressed); (2) theoretical orientation; and (3) research methodology. Most studies that were published before 1999 do not include explicit references to the theoretical framework used; however, the authors of this article could extract the theoretical orientation(s) of the author(s) based on the scholar(s) discussed in the studies and the theoretical mapping done in previous researches (e.g. Bélanger, 2011; English & Mayo, 2021; Hake, 2021). Similarly, because the research methodology most of the studies published before 2001 was not explicitly described, the authors of this article did their own categorisation in line with different kinds of qualitative research (Hatch, 2002, pp. 20–33). Other categories emerged from the data during the analysis and were developed *a posteriori* after reading and rereading the collected articles: (4) IGO concepts addressed and (5) IGO policies discussed in relation to problems and solutions proposed by IGOs. Therefore, both deductive and inductive (Drisco & Maschi, 2015) approaches were used in the qualitative content analysis.

Results

Research questions and article objectives (IGOs addressed)

Since 1982 in the IJLE, the data collection showed a continuous interest in the discussion of IGOs and ALE. The articles under analysis have raised research questions that aim at critically discussing and interpreting/comprehending the concepts used in policy documents, (historical) trends, and influences/impacts of IGO policies in national contexts of ALE. In some articles, the authors focused on a diachronic perspective by studying the evolution of IGO policy guidelines; other articles focused on a synchronic debate on topics selected, stressing issues and shifts related to changes outside both academia and the public policy realm, reflecting structural transformations occurring beyond the scope of the research being debated. These changes concerned policy transformations in what relates to the (increasing) role of IGOs in ALE, but also in what refers to advanced capitalist economies shifts within, for instance, the world of work and/or of labour

Table 1. Overview of 19 studies published in IJLE (1982–2020).

Publication year	Author(s)	Article's title	Research questions and objectives (IGOs addressed)	Theoretical orientation	Research methodology options	IGOs' concepts addressed	IGOs' policies discussed (policy problems and solutions)
1982	Lawson	Lifelong education: concept or policy?	What is the meaning of lifelong education according to UNESCO? To discuss critically lifelong education from UNESCO (UNESCO)	Marxist-humanism (Suchodolski), Marxist-existentialism (Lengrand), humanism (White, Cropley)	Qualitative (documentary analysis), comprehensive approach	Lifelong education	An Introduction to Lifelong Learning (Lengrand, 1970)
1982	Duke	Evolution of the recurrent education concept	What is the meaning of recurrent education? To discuss the history and aims behind the concept of recurrent education (OECD)	Critical pedagogy/radical education (Freire, Foley)	Qualitative (documentary analysis), historical and comprehensive approach	Recurrent education	Recurrent Education: A Strategy for Lifelong Learning (OECD, 1973) Recurrent Education: Trends and Issues (OECD, 1975) Educational Policies and Trends in the Context of Social and Economic Development Perspectives (OECD, 1977)
1985	Wain	Lifelong education and philosophy of education	What are the theoretical foundations of lifelong education? To discuss theoretical foundations of lifelong education (UNESCO)	Marxist-existentialism (Lengrand), radical education (Gelpi, Illich), humanism (White, Cropley)	Qualitative, comprehensive approach	Lifelong education	Learning to Be (Faure et al., 1972) An Introduction to Lifelong Education (Lengrand, 1970)

Table 1. (Continued).

Publication year	Author(s)	Article's title	Research questions and objectives (IGOs addressed)	Theoretical orientation	Research methodology options	IGOs' concepts addressed	IGOs' policies discussed (policy problems and solutions)
1993	Wain	Lifelong education and adult education – the state of the theory	How can the concept of lifelong education be interpreted following the literature, considering a maximalist and a minimalist view? '[T]o clarify some confusions with the concept of lifelong education by examining two different interpretations or views of lifelong education, the "maximalist" and the "minimalist"'. (p. 85) (UNESCO)	Marxist-humanism (Suchodolski), Marxist-existentialism (Lengrand), radical education (Gelpi), humanism (White, Illich), humanism (White, Dave, Cropley)	Qualitative, comprehensive approach	Lifelong education	Learning to Be (Faure et al., 1972)
Griffin, 1999a	Griffin	Lifelong learning and social democracy	How was LLL understood in the social democracy political approach? To analyse two approaches to LLL within social democracy policies and the neoliberal welfare (UNESCO, OECD, EU) '[T]o outline this shift in terms of two approaches to lifelong learning, one of which is called the progressive social democratic approach and the other the neo-liberal welfare reform approach' (p. 329)	Welfare state regimes, Postmodernism (Beck, Bauman, Usher, Edwards), globalisation (Giddens, Robertson)	Qualitative (documentary analysis), comprehensive approach, educational criticism	LLL, lifelong education	Learning to Be (Faure et al., 1972) Learning: The Treasure Within (Delors et al., 1996) Recurrent Education: A Strategy for Lifelong Learning (OECD, 1973) Lifelong Learning for All (OECD, 1996) Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society (EU, 1996)

Table 1. (Continued).

Publication year	Author(s)	Article's title	Research questions and objectives (IGOs addressed)	Theoretical orientation	Research methodology options	IGOs' concepts addressed	IGOs' policies discussed (policy problems and solutions)
Griffin, 1999b	Griffin	Lifelong learning and welfare reform	What are the limitations of LLL as an object of policy? To 'explore the scope and limitations of lifelong learning as an object of policy' (p. 431) (UNESCO, OECD, EU)	Welfare state regimes discussion and postmodernism (Beck, Bauman, Usher, Edwards), globalisation (Giddens, Robertson)	Qualitative (documentary analysis), comprehensive approach, educational criticism	LLL, lifelong education,	Learning to Be (Faure et al., 1972) Learning: The Treasure Within (Delors et al., 1996) Recurrent Education: A Strategy for Lifelong Learning (OECD, 1973) Lifelong Learning for All (OECD, 1996) Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society (EU, 1996)
2001	Field	Lifelong education	How did the debate on the concept of lifelong education evolve, from the 1960s to the present, within IGOs? To discuss the changes in the meanings of the concept of lifelong education since the 1960s in IGOs until the 're-emergence' of the concept as LLL in the 2000s. (UNESCO, PECD, CoE, EU)	Comparative education, Marxist-existentialism (Lengrand), humanism (Dave), radical education (Gelpi)	Qualitative (documentary analysis), historical approach, comprehensive approach, educational criticism	LLL, lifelong education, *éducation permanente*, learning society Recurrent education Permanent education LLL	Learning to Be (Faure et al., 1972) Learning: The Treasure Within (Delors et al., 1996) The Agenda for the Future (UNESCO, 1998) Lifelong Learning for All (OECD, 1996) Combatting Social Exclusion through Adult Learning (OECD, 1998) Competitiveness, Employment, Growth (EU, 1994) Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society (EU, 1995)

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Publication year	Author(s)	Article's title	Research questions and objectives (IGOs addressed)	Theoretical orientation	Research methodology options	IGOs' concepts addressed	IGOs' policies discussed (policy problems and solutions)
2011	Centeno	Lifelong learning: a policy concept with a long past but a short history	What are the continuities and discontinuities in the international 'problematisation of education across the lifespan as an education policy, conceptualised as lifelong learning'? (p. 133) To discuss 'the most recent descendant' of a family of concepts, models or reform ideas, which conceptualise education across the lifespan (EAL) as an education policy'; to debate how education across the lifespan was initially an educational approach/paradigm mainly conceived and adopted for the purpose of ALE; to interpret how the concept was appropriated and formalised by the IGOs and converted into educational policy (p. 134). (UNESCO, OECD, EU, CoE)	Poststructuralism (Foucault), comparative education	Qualitative (documentary analysis), historical approach, comprehensive approach, educational criticism	*Education permanente*, lifelong education, LLL,

Recurrent education

LLL

Permanent education | Learning to be (Faure et al., 1972) Learning: The Treasure Within (Delors et al., 1996) 1945 UNESCO: 50 years for Education (UNESCO, 1997)

Recurrent Education: A strategy for Lifelong Learning (OECD, 1973) Recurrent Education: Trends and Issues (OECD, 1975) Recurrent Education Revisited (OECD, 1986)

Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (EU, 2000)

Permanent Education: A Compendium of Studies (CoE1970) Permanent Education: The Basis and Essentials (CoE, 1973) Permanente Education. A Framework for Recurrent Education (CoE, 1975) |

Table 1. (Continued).

Publication year	Author(s)	Article's title	Research questions and objectives (IGOs addressed)	Theoretical orientation	Research methodology options	IGOs' concepts addressed	IGOs' policies discussed (policy problems and solutions)
2011	Lee & Friedrich	Continuously reaffirmed, subtly accommodated, obviously missing and fallaciously critiqued: ideologies in UNESCO's lifelong learning policy	What are the 'authoritative and marginal ideological influences within UNESCO's lifelong learning policy during the period between the 1990s and the early 2000s'? (p. 151) To 'perform an ideological analysis of UNESCO's lifelong learning policy concepts' (p. 152) (UNESCO)	Ideology critique: classical liberalism (Hobbes, Locke, Smith), social democratic liberalism (Hobhouse, Hobson), neoliberalism (Friedman), and (neo) Marxism (Marx, Althusser, Frankfurt school, critical pedagogy)	Qualitative (documentary analysis), historical and comprehensive approach, educational criticism	*Éducation permanente*, LLL, lifelong education	Report of the Director-General on the Activities of the Organisation (UNESCO, 1968) Learning to Be (Faure et al., 1972) Learning: The Treasure Within (Delors et al., 1996) 50 Years for Education (UNESCO, 1997) Inter-Agency Strategy Meeting on Lifelong Learning: 2nd draft Report (UNESCO, 2002) UIE Annual Report (UNESCO, 2003)
2014	Bonnafous	Trans-nationalisation of education policy making: from European innovation projects in adult education to an emerging European space for lifelong learning: what model for the European vocational education and training policy?	How the LEONARDO project can be understood as an innovation design project within the vocational education and training for national public policies of the EU considering the European space of education construction? To contribute 'to a general understanding of the phenomenon of innovation, in the context of European calls for projects, as an instrument of the European Vocational Education and Training (VET) Policy, which is supposed to transform the national training systems of EU member states according to the Lisbon Strategy' (p. 393) (EU)	Comparative education, Discourse analysis (Foucault), public policy/sociological analysis, social innovation, European space (Dale)	Qualitative (interviews, documentary analysis, observation), comparative study of Belgium, Germany, France and Sweden	Adult education policy, LLL	Growth, Competitiveness and Employment (EU, 1993) Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society (EU, 1995) Making a European Area for Lifelong Learning a Reality (EU, 2001)

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (Continued).

Publication year	Author(s)	Article's title	Research questions and objectives (IGOs addressed)	Theoretical orientation	Research methodology options	IGOs' concepts addressed	IGOs' policies discussed (policy problems and solutions)
2014	Cavaco, Lafont, & Pariat	Policies of adult education in Portugal and France: the European agenda of validation of non-formal and informal learning	What is 'the influence of the European Union's educational policies on the implementation of devices for the recognition and the validation of informal and non-formal learning within public policies on education and training for adults in European Union Member States such as France and Portugal?' (p. 343) To discuss the influence of the EU's educational policies on the implementation of devices for the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning within public policies (France, Portugal) (EU)	Comparative education (Nóvoa, Dale), educational and policy discussion (Barroso, Canário, Pineau, Jobert)	Qualitative (documentary analysis), case studies of Portugal and France	Adult education policy, LLL, validation of non-formal and informal learning	White Paper on Education and Training (EU, 1995) Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (EU, 2000) Council Resolution on a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning (EU, 2011) Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (EU, 2012) European Agenda for Adult Learning and Recent Policy Developments (EU, 2013)

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Publication year	Author(s)	Article's title	Research questions and objectives (IGOs addressed)	Theoretical orientation	Research methodology options	IGOs' concepts addressed	IGOs' policies discussed (policy problems and solutions)
2014	Szakos	Learning as renewal: contribution to the present theoretical background of lifelong learning policy of the European Union	'Is lifelong learning or human learning/adult learning defined in the document? Is the nature of learning conceptualized in the document? If yes, how? Does the document contain any references or data on recommended publications (at least in the bibliography) about the theory/concept of learning, and are they the latest ones?' (p. 505) To analyse 'the documents of the European Union on lifelong learning from the aspect of how compatible they are with the most recent adult learning theories assisting the deeper understanding of the characteristics of adult learning' (p. 504) (EU)	Transformation as learning/ transformative learning (Dewey, Kolb, Mezirow, Jarvis, Dewey), constructivism, biographical learning (Siebert), Action-learning (O'Neil & Marsick)	Qualitative (documentary analysis)	LLL	Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (EU, 2000) Strategic framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (EU, 2009) Action Plan on Adult Learning: Achievements and Results 2008–2010 (EU, 2011)
2016	Casey & Asamoah	Education and sustainability: reinvigorating adult education's role in transformation, justice and development	How can the new opportunities implied for LLL in UNESCO's Agenda 2030 be taken up in ALE in Ghana? To discuss the UNESCO understanding of LLL, considering the space devoted to ALE, from a humanistic approach of the 1970s and an instrumental approach of the 2010s, considering here the sustainable development approach of UNESCO (UNESCO)	Humanism, transformative education (Jarvis, Freire, Welton), (adult) educational and policy discussion (Rubenson, Elfert, Field, Zarifis & Gravani)	Qualitative (documentary analysis, observation, interviews within field study), case study of Ghana	LLL, sustainable development	Learning to Be (Faure et al.,1972) Learning: The Treasure Within (Delors et al, 1996) Belém Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2010) Education Strategy 2014–2021 (UNESCO, 2014) Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015) Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good? UNESCO, 2015)

Table 1. (Continued).

Publication year	Author(s)	Article's title	Research questions and objectives (IGOs addressed)	Theoretical orientation	Research methodology options	IGOs' concepts addressed	IGOs' policies discussed (policy problems and solutions)
2016	Clain	Challenges in evaluating the EU's lifelong learning policies	What evaluation model can be proposed to evaluate the complexity of EU LLL policies? 'TT]o explore the challenges which arise when evaluating the EU's lifelong learning policies and programmes in general, and the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007–2013 in particular, as well as to propose several new directions for overcoming these challenges' (p. 18) (EU)	Concept of LLL (Jarvis, Aspin et al., Sharples, Hager, Bagnall), ideologies of LLL (Bagnall)	Qualitative (documentary analysis), educational criticism	LLL	Growth, Competitiveness, Employment (EU, 1993) Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality (2001) Council Resolution on a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning (EU, 2011) Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007–2013) (EU, 2011)

Table 1. (Continued).

Publication year	Author(s)	Article's title	Research questions and objectives (IGOs addressed)	Theoretical orientation	Research methodology options	IGOs' concepts addressed	IGOs' policies discussed (policy problems and solutions)
2017	Field & Schemmann	International organisations and the construction of the learning active citizen: an analysis of adult learning policy documents from a Durkheimian perspective	'[H]ow citizenship is conceptualised in policy documents of four key international organisations' (p. 164) 'T]o investigate how four key international organisations – the European Commission, the United Nations, the World Bank [WB] and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – conceptualise citizenship in their thinking on lifelong learning' (p. 164) (UNESCO, OECD, EU, WB)	Durkheim's theory of politics and the state, globalisation (Jarvis)	Qualitative (documentary analysis)	LLL, adult learning policy LLL, adult learning policy LLL, adult learning policy	Summary Report of the International Conference on Adult Education (UNESCO, 1994) Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2015) Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015) Education Today 2013. The OECD Perspective (OECD, 2012) Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen (OECD, 2015) Growth, Competitiveness, Employment (EU, 1993) Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society (EU, 1995) Education and Active Citizenship in the European Union (EU, 1998) Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000) A New Skills Agenda for Europe (EU, 2016) Education Sector Strategy (WB, 2011) Lifelong Learning for All: Investing in People's Knowledge and Skills to Promote Development (WB, 2011)

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Publication year	Author(s)	Article's title	Research questions and objectives (IGOs addressed)	Theoretical orientation	Research methodology options	IGOs' concepts addressed	IGOs' policies discussed (policy problems and solutions)
2017	Regmi	Habermas, lifeworld and rationality: towards a comprehensive model of lifelong learning	'How could Habermasian theory inform the humanistic notion of lifelong learning? What is the role of human rationality in learning? And does a complete negation of rationality lead towards emancipation?' (p. 681) To discuss the critical theory developed by Habermas as an important approach for understanding why the humanistic model of LLL has been incapable of informing the educational policy decisions of individual countries and to propose a different model (UNESCO, OECD, EU)	Critical theory (Habermas), transformative learning (Mezirow)	Qualitative (documentary analysis), educational criticism	LLL LLL LLL	Learning to Be (Faure et al., 1972) Learning: The Treasure Within (Delors et al., 1996) Lifelong Learning for All (OECD, 1996) Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (EU, 2000)
2018	Cort, Mariager-Anderson, & Thomsen	Busting the myth of low-skilled workers – destabilising EU LLL policies through the life stories of Danes in low-skilled jobs	What are the silences and alternative ways of thinking about the EU representation of low-skilled workers? What are the lived effects on the low-skilled workers' representations of themselves? To problematise the representation of low-skilled workers in EU policies (EU)	Governmentality (Foucault)	Qualitative (documentary analysis, interviews/ narrative inquiry of adult learners)	LLL, upskilling	Council Resolution on a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning (EU, 2011) Tackling Low Skills: The Skills Guarantee (EU, 2016)

Table 1. (Continued).

Publication year	Author(s)	Article's title	Research questions and objectives (IGOs addressed)	Theoretical orientation	Research methodology options	IGOs' concepts addressed	IGOs' policies discussed (policy problems and solutions)
Tuparevska et al., 2020a	Tuparevska, Santibáñez, & Solabarrieta	Equity and social exclusion measures in European Union lifelong learning policies	Following Berne and Stiefel (1984), four questions are stated in what refers to equity in education: 'who, what, how and how much?' (p. 8) To examine 'how EU lifelong learning policies are trying to reach the vulnerable by looking at what measures against social exclusion they offer and how equitable these measures are' (p. 5) (EU)	Equity (Berne & Stiefel, Levin)	Qualitative (documentary analysis, experts' interviews)	LLL	Growth, Competitiveness, Employment (EU, 1993) Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society (EU, 1995) Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (EU, 2000) The Concrete Future Objectives of Education and Training Systems (EU, 2001) Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (EU, 2009) Council Resolution on a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning (EU, 2011) Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways (EU, 2016)

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Publication year	Author(s)	Article's title	Research questions and objectives (IGOs addressed)	Theoretical orientation	Research methodology options	IGOs' concepts addressed	IGOs' policies discussed (policy problems and solutions)
Tuparevska et al., 2020b	Tuparevska, Santibáñez, & Solabarrieta	Social exclusion in European Union lifelong learning policies: prevalence and definitions	'[H]ow the concept has evolved from the 1990s in terms of meaning, definitions and closely connected concepts, what are the implications of this evolution, and whether there is coherence between the conceptual evolution and lifelong learning policy' (p. 179) '[T]o analyse the concept of social exclusion in EU lifelong learning policies' (p. 179) (EU)	Social exclusion (Mathieson)	Qualitative (document analysis, experts' interviews)	LLL	Growth, Competitiveness, Employment (EU, 1993) Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society (EU, 1995) Resolution of the Council of Ministers for Social Affairs on Combating Social Exclusion (EU, 1989) Council Conclusions of 20 December 1996 on a Strategy for Lifelong Learning (EU, 1997) Joint Report on Social Inclusion (EU, 2004). Council Resolution on a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning (EU, 2011)

markets. Additionally, it is possible to observe that the focus of the articles on IGOs and their policies changed over the course of the four decades: for example, in the articles from the 1980s, UNESCO, OECD and CoE policies received more significant stress, and the concepts of lifelong education, recurrent education and *éducation permanente* were important topics (Duke, 1982; Lawson, 1982); in the 1990s, UNESCO, OECD and EU policies were debated regarding concepts such as lifelong education and LLL, and recurrent education and the learning society were still of primary importance (Griffin, 1999a, 1999b; K. Wain, 1993); in the first decade of the millennium, from a historical perspective, Field (2001) discussed the changes in UNESCO's, OECD's, CoE's and the EU's concepts of lifelong education, recurrent education, *éducation permanente* to LLL and the learning society; while in the second decade of the millennium, IGO policies were debated to a greater extent and included all the mentioned concepts from the first three decades but with greater visibility given to LLL, the EU and its policies and to new concepts, such as adult learning policy and upskilling, as well as sustainable development (from UNESCO; Centeno, 2011; Lee & Friedrich, 2011; Bonnafous, 2014; Cavaco et al., 2014; Szakos, 2014; Casey & Asamoah, 2016; Clain, 2016; Field & Schemmann, 2017; Regmi, 2017; Cort et al., 2018; Tuparevska et al., 2020a, 2020b).

Some articles were closer to the historical momentum in which the specific policy proposals were produced and released. This circumstance could indicate that there was a temporal relationship between policy production and academic research, the latter being overdetermined by the time of political action and its specific rhythms (such as can be observed in Duke, 1982; Cavaco et al., 2014; Szakos, 2014; Clain, 2016; Cort et al., 2018; Tuparevska et al., 2020a, 2020b). Moreover, the introduction of new research problems and certain concepts was directly influenced by the historical momentum of IGOs' policy production, by its discourses and by political proposals for ALE, which is the case with Bonnafous' (2014) article on the LEONARDO project; Cavaco et al.'s (2014) article, where the authors linked LLL with the European agenda of the validation of nonformal and informal learning; Casey and Asamoah's (2016) article, where the authors connected LLL with UNESCO's concept of sustainable development; and Clain's (2016) article, in which the author related LLL and the evaluation of LLL Programme 2007–2013. Following a similar path, Cort et al. (2018) debated LLL within the EU's upskilling, and Tuparevska et al. (2020a, 2020b) linked LLL to the concept of the social exclusion/inclusion of vulnerable adults. In parallel, other articles (Casey & Asamoah, 2016; Centeno, 2011; Field, 2001; Field & Schemmann, 2017; Griffin, 1999a, 1999b; Lee & Friedrich, 2011; Regmi, 2017) were more distanced from the historical momentum, discussing IGO policies as being detached from policy production.

Theoretical orientation

When it comes to theoretical orientation, diversity was found in the analysed articles. Three main theoretical strains were identified: (a) *theories of ALE* based on different philosophies of adult education (cf., Bagnall & Hodge, 2018; Elias & Merriam, 2005), of a normative kind (because they focus on what is humanly important) and which deal with issues of values, the purposes of ALE, the role of the teacher and learner and didactics; (b) *social theory*, which has an interdisciplinary nature and strives to explain social behaviour, focusing on themes such as the nature of social life, the possibility of social transformation, gender, race and class and so forth and that tends to deepen the discussion around researched educational phenomena that are in danger of being oversimplified (cf., Murphy, 2013); and (c) *IGOs' policy discourses*, which are related to the problem-solving approach to ALE policy/'research for policy' or to 'research of policy' (cf., Desjardins & Rubenson, 2009).

Of the 19 analysed articles, seven articles used theories of ALE (Lawson, 1982; Duke, 1982; K. A. Wain, 1985; K. Wain, 1993; Szakos, 2014; Casey & Asamoah, 2016; Clain, 2016), two articles used IGO policy discourses (Tuparevska et al., 2020a, 2020b), and two used social theory (Bonnafous, 2014; Cort et al., 2018), while eight articles used a combination of social theory and theories of ALE (Cavaco et al., 2014; Centeno, 2011; Field, 2001; Field & Schemmann, 2017; Griffin,

1999a, 1999b; Lee & Friedrich, 2011; Regmi, 2017). The articles using social theory showed that IGO (EU, OECD) policies strived towards harmonisation and standardisation, focusing predominantly on employability and competence development (Bonnafous, 2014) and fostering aims that are directed at 'showing solutions' to member states (Clain, 2016). Some articles raised critical concerns about the shift of focus from structural social problems ('structural conditions') towards the individual responsibility ('socio-psychological conditions') of adult workers (Cort et al., 2018), citizens and/or learners (Field & Schemmann, 2017). Similarly, those articles referring to theories of ALE emphasised the 'emancipatory and transformational potential of ALE' and learning as a 'transformation or change', drawing attention to the shift from the holistic understandings of ALE and LLL found in different theories of ALE towards its economic and instrumental conceptualisation, as promoted by IGO (EU, OECD) policies (Regmi, 2017). Furthermore, a predominant focus on employability and the individualisation of social problems was also stressed as problematic in the IGOs' (mainly EU) policy discourses (Cort et al., 2018). Finally, it was also clear from the analysis of theoretical orientations that several articles, especially when considering the Delors et al. (1996) and Faure et al. (1972) reports, saw UNESCO policies as the 'gold standard' for humanistic ALE and/or lifelong education, while the policies of the EU and OECD were seen as focusing on employability and an economistic perspective on ALE and/or LLL and had instrumental value (Szakos, 2014).

Research methodology

The authors of the analysed articles generally used qualitative research methodologies when discussing and interpreting the policy discourses and concepts of IGOs. This is not surprising because ALE scholars, as previous research has shown, have relied predominantly on qualitative methodologies (cf., Rubenson & Elfert, 2015, p. 132). If the articles of the first period were more hermeneutic but comprehensive in nature (Willamo et al., 2018), documentary analysis of relevant policy documents from IGOs was the methodological approach found most often and centred on content analysis or discourse analysis, especially in the articles of the last years. In a few articles (Bonnafous, 2014; Cort et al., 2018; Tuparevska et al., 2020a, 2020b), other methodological approaches were preferred, including interviews with those relevant agents involved in policy development and observations of practices/activities within specific policy programmes (Casey & Asamoah, 2016).

IGO concepts addressed

IGO concepts addressed in the selected articles included LLL – the expression most often included in articles' titles (11 times), for instance, – while lifelong education (4), adult education (2) and recurrent education (1) were found less often. When these concepts were indicated frequently in the title, a significant number of articles discussed the meanings of LLL/lifelong education/recurrent education (Griffin, 1999a, 1999b; Centeno, 2011; Lee & Friedrich, 2011; Bonnafous, 2014; Szakos, 2014; Clain, 2016; Regmi, 2017; Cort et al., 2018; Tuparevska et al., 2020a, 2020b). Several articles discussed the meaning of LLL/lifelong education/recurrent education in reference to political dimensions (policy planning or development and evaluation, depending on the policy cycle approach), here following theoretical debates held by other scholars and while referring to the educational paradigms in which the concepts can be located. Therefore, the discussion was not centred on policy documents or educational policy debates; rather, it focussed on those contributions made by several authors, here following philosophical and epistemological arguments. This path for analysing the meaning of the different concepts was visible in the research questions and objectives (even if not always clearly stated) of the articles. For instance, arguing about the meanings proposed by different authors, such as Cropley (1979), concerning the establishment of a difference between the maximalist and minimalist understanding of lifelong education, K. Wain (1993) set the

following aim for his study: '[T]o clarify some confusions with the concept of lifelong education by examining two different interpretations or views of lifelong education, the "maximalist" and the "minimalist"' (p. 85).

Other articles favoured a historical approach, debating the changes of the meanings of the referred concepts, from lifelong education (and recurrent education) to LLL. These changes were linked to the development of wider policies, namely the 'shift' from social democratic policies to neoliberal ones (Griffin, 1999a, 1999b). These changes were also related to a 'U-turn' from a theoretical discussion on the paradigms of LLL to an educational policy-centred discussion, as Centeno (2011) stated; the aims of her article were 'to debate how education across the lifespan was initially an educational approach/paradigm mainly conceived and adopted for the purpose of ALE; to interpret how the concept was appropriated and formalised by the IGOs and converted into educational policy' (p. 134).

Recent articles, such as those published after 2014, have debated the meaning of LLL mainly from an educational policy perspective. This discussion was accomplished using mostly policy, sociological or philosophical concepts or theoretical approaches (including authors such as Durkheim, Habermas or Dale; Field & Schemmann, 2017; Regmi, 2017), and/or following (adult) education authors (such as Mezirow, Freire, Jarvis and Kolb; Szakos, 2014; Casey & Asamoah, 2016; Clain, 2016; Regmi, 2017). In these articles, the discussion referring to LLL/lifelong education no longer centred on a (wide) understanding of the concept but included other related concepts present in the guidelines, policies and programmes of IGOs. An example of such an option can be found in Field and Schemmann (2017), as the aim of the article included, 'to investigate how four key intergovernmental organisations – the European Commission, the United Nations, the World Bank and the OECD – conceptualise citizenship in their thinking on lifelong learning' (p. 164). Tuparevska et al. (2020a, 2020b), here relating to social exclusion/inclusion, stated the following aim: to examine 'how EU lifelong learning policies are trying to reach the vulnerable by looking at what measures against social exclusion they offer and how equitable these measures are' (p. 5).

If the referred articles discussed LLL mainly as ideology, policies, guidelines or programmes of IGOs, 'adult education' was most often referred to when the debate was centred on national policies (Casey & Asamoah, 2016; Cavaco et al., 2014). Therefore, in contrast with most articles under analysis, a few debated the influence/impact of IGOs' ideologies, policies and programmes on national policies from, for instance, Belgium, Germany, France and Sweden (Bonnafous, 2014), France and Portugal (Cavaco et al., 2014) and also Ghana (Casey & Asamoah, 2016).

IGO policies discussed (policy problems and solutions)

The IGOs have been recognised as important global agents addressing political problems on a global level and creating global public policies that map out a range of appropriate solutions to national governments. However, when researching educational policy, two different approaches can be identified: (a) 'research for policy', or a problem-solving approach, in which the problem is taken as a given and only when the solution is of relevance, and (b) 'research of policy', or a critical approach, in which both the problem and solution are problematised (Desjardins & Rubenson, 2009).

Both approaches were present in the analysed articles. However, the policy/critical approach research dominated. Of the 19 articles, 17 used a critical approach (Lawson, 1982; Duke, 1982; K. A. Wain, 1985; K. Wain, 1993; Griffin, 1999a, 1999b; Field, 2001; Centeno, 2011; Lee & Friedrich, 2011; Cavaco et al., 2014; Szakos, 2014; Bonnafous, 2014; Field & Schemmann, 2017; Regmi, 2017; Cort et al., 2018; Tuparevska et al., 2020a, 2020b), one combined a critical approach with a problem-solving approach (Casey & Asamoah, 2016), and one stressed a problem-solving approach (Clain, 2016). The articles using a critical approach identified and problematised problems set in IGOs' policies, such as economic competitiveness, the supply of skills and social problems, here in the case of the EU, or sustaining democracy, peace and human rights, here in the case of UNESCO. These

studies criticised those IGO (EU, OECD) policy solutions that ignored the 'demand' side – such as the demand for low-skilled workers for low-skilled jobs – and saw ALE and LLL as 'essential tools' to promote economic development and overcome unemployment and social exclusion (EU, OECD). However, those UNESCO policy solutions that consider ALE and LLL as tools to reach 'peaceful, democratic, inclusive, tolerant and sustainable societies' (Casey & Asamoah, 2016, p. 595) were not the subjects of much critique. Furthermore, other articles using a critical approach also drew attention to the Matthew effect, meaning that instead of reducing inequalities, ALE was actually increasing them: '[A]dult education and lifelong learning policies are failing to target those who are most in need of learning opportunities, reaching instead those who already are well educated and who have higher socioeconomic status' (Tuparevska et al., 2020a, p. 5).

Discussion

The analysed articles referred to different intersections between the political and scientific fields (Bourdieu, 1994, 1997). For those articles published between 1982 and 1993, although the articles tended not to be explicit about their theoretical frameworks and methodological options – not always following the classical 'paper' format – there was a concentration of effort in terms of philosophical and anthropological debates and of educational theories and concepts (such as Duke, 1982). Looking for theoretical foundations and conceptual clarifications seemed a crucial *démarche* for strengthening ALE's scientific subfield. IGO policies and policy documents were interpreted and discussed as objects of study, less as theoretical and conceptual sources, thus escaping a scientific agenda overdetermined by the political field, albeit being generically influenced by it in terms of the agendas, problems and solutions produced by IGOs (such as K. A. Wain, 1985).

The relative autonomy of the scientific subfield of ALE – in terms of the research agendas, concepts and problems – tended to be present in articles published later as well. Some over-determination of political agendas, as well as a certain temporal proximity between policy documents and academic papers, became apparent. In those articles published between 1999 and 2011, there was a concentration on conceptual changes and meanings, from lifelong education to LLL, here in terms of policy developments, educational perspectives, social policies, the role of the state and the emerging role of the market (such as Field, 2001). Furthermore, in more recent articles published between 2014 and 2020, political, sociological and philosophical analysis of the institutional conceptualisations produced by IGOs, the construction of educational policy approaches and a discussion of certain social impacts in some EU member states gained prominence (such as Cavaco et al., 2014). Over the past two decades of academic production on IGOs in the IJLE, the concept of LLL became dominant, even when most of these articles criticised and interpreted the political and institutional meanings of this change, certainly not merely in terms of terminology. The relative overdetermination of political agendas over academic agendas was, however, more apparent than real in the context of an academic journal with a high status in the scientific subfield of ALE. There were clear indicators of a certain 'coefficient of refraction' (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 61) in relation to political discourses and political concepts when appropriated by the scientific field. For example, articles with a 'research for policy' and 'problem-solving' nature (Desjardins & Rubenson, 2009) are almost absent, even when combined with articles with an analytical and hermeneutical vocation. This results in greater academic autonomy in the scientific production of IGOs' policies in this journal. Publications more pluralistic and open to scientific dispute resulted in articles from different positions and with diverse authorial motivations; these adopted a more critical and comprehensive internal logic, as opposed to a purposeful and prescriptive one, and although they shared certain rules of production, they contained both alternative and conflicting interpretations. Despite the heterogeneity of scientific agendas and theoretical references expressed in the selected articles, as well as the different origins, the positions and relative hierarchies of scientific agents involved in this academic production, the impacts of IGOs were more evident as objects of study and less influential as theoretical and conceptual sources. In most cases, academic agendas were

influenced by political agendas and their founding texts, but most articles chose academic theories to analyse and make sense of the policy documents. The normative texts of the various IGOs analysed, along with their respective policy concepts, key ideas and rationales for education and learning, assumed a leading role as objects of study, especially in more recent articles published between 2014 and 2020. This centrality was, however, the object of theoretical and critical interpretations based on social theories and was sometimes combined with educational theories. Disciplinary intersections were more frequent, especially in cases where the articles did not limit ALE to a simple object of study on the part of social theories, state theories and social policy approaches, and when assuming that education has historically constituted a field of practices and educational theories that also include an analytical vocation. The resulting potential hybridity tended to combine analytical purposes and certain normative guidelines, though not prescriptive, rejecting a value-neutral social and educational theory, as was the case, among others, of radical/emancipatory pedagogical approaches and of critical and poststructuralist social theories (such as Field & Schemmann, 2017).

The transition from politics as texts produced by central political agents to their translation into political orientations and contextual and organisational practices, here through localised receptions and various processes of recontextualisation, appropriation and interpretation was an analytical process infrequent in the analysed *corpus*. Despite the global influence of IGOs, ALE policies in action always imply specific social, economic and cultural contexts – from the state to education organisations and to groups and subgroups of learners – including those social dynamics influenced not only by global or transnational texts, but also by interpretations and alterations produced by local political and educational agents (such as Cort et al., 2018). These complex articulations, eventually originating from different social fields and referring to the tensions and struggles between them, were also less studied. Texts still have tended to predominate over contexts. The mega- and macro-analytical levels seemed to be more consensual and shared within the scientific subfield of ALE, as did certain positions that tended to receive less criticism and, therefore, in relation to UNESCO's political guidelines, greater acceptance by scientific agents. This includes a fairly generalised, less critical and relatively idealised (Hake, 2021) reception of the reports by, for example, Faure et al. (1972) and Delors et al. (1996). On the one hand, this fact can be understood by considering the axiological dimensions of an advocacy agenda that are typical of the political field and that continue to maintain a visible presence within the scientific discourse of ALE. The academic investigation of social problems, even when it reveals itself capable of translating these social problems into sociological or social theory problems, is confronted with the normativity characteristic of political ideas and with the power relations from which problems and solutions are socially constructed. On the other hand, appearing less often and less influential than the OECD and, in recent years, than the EU, UNESCO seems to enjoy a certain status as symbolic capital (such as Casey & Asamoah, 2016) that still reveals itself capable of exerting a certain force of attraction within the scientific subfield of ALE. This is something that deserves in-depth study as an element capable of characterising the current scientific subfield of ALE, as expressed in the academic articles of a scientific journal.

In any case, the relative autonomy of the scientific subfield of ALE recognised in the current study did not prevent the recognition of the centrality of the policies and discourses of some IGOs, the protagonism of their texts as legitimate sources and priority objects of study (such as Tuparevska et al., 2020a, 2020b). For this reason, less attention has been paid to other instances and agents of production, as well as to distinct or alternative political and educational ideals and texts. Thus, the current moment is marked by the hegemony of a constellation of policy concepts that occupy a central place in the scientific discourse. These concepts may have an origin that is not always clear or understood because some are already the result of political resignifications of previous academic ones, while others emerge from the political field, the economic field or even from governance and management theories.

Conclusion

The current article has addressed two main research questions: (1) How has research in ALE evolved in terms of policy discourses and concepts referring to IGOs, and (2) what is the impact of IGOs as part of the political field of power on the research agendas of ALE, as shown in the *corpus* of the selected scientific articles published in the IJLE over the past four decades. Based on qualitative content analysis, the present article has discussed the intersections between the political and scientific fields, here based on research on IGO discourses and ALE published in the IJLE since its inception until 2020.

By addressing the first research question, we elaborated on two categories – the research questions and objectives of IGOs addressed and the concepts of IGO addressed – and emphasised that over the last four decades, IGOs used different concepts (as these changed over time), as well as the identified conceptual changes that occurred in policy discourses of IGOs, policy transformations related to the increased role of IGOs in ALE and the temporal relationship between policy production and academic research. Furthermore, we also showed topics favoured by authors over the last four decades in the selected articles' corpus, namely the major trend of discussing and interpreting IGOs' policy documents. If this trend is a strong presence in the data collected, it is important to stress some absences. Among these, rarely have articles considered IGOs as the study objects in terms of the process of conception and production of ALE policies, here involving experts and other stakeholders, as well as those approaching the role of researchers (some of the authors who published in the IJLE over the years) in IGOs' policy conception and in the production of ALE policies. Similarly, not many articles discussed the instruments IGOs use that go beyond discursive dissemination – such as standard setting, financial means, coordinative functions and technical assistance (cf., Mikulec, 2021) – that enable policy transfer and provide tools for managing, monitoring and benchmarking ALE practices.

By addressing the second research question and relying on Bourdieu's field theory and the idea that the political and scientific fields are the arenas of struggle, we elaborated on three categories – theoretical orientation, research methodology and IGO's policies discussed – emphasising the influence of IGOs in ALE academic publishing. However, in the selected article *corpus*, these included the authors' critical reflections and did not simply accept or reproduce (without problematising) the discourses and concepts of the referred organisations. Therefore, the relative autonomy of the subfield of ALE was emphasised, though this stronger emphasis was more apparent in studies published before 2014. It is important to stress that any uncritical incorporation of the values, discourses and concepts within the scientific subfield of ALE will represent a loss of its relative autonomy, an absence of the refraction effect of influences originating in other fields and a decrease in the capacity to resist hegemonic political discourses that come to exert a direct influence on science and represent a higher degree of internal consensus within the scientific field. This could result in its crisis, in the loss of collective control and in the heteronomy of agents. The context of the scientific production of a highly prestigious journal in its academic area seems to represent a privileged *locus* for the expression of relative autonomy and diversity and the conflicts and creativity essential to the strengthening of a scientific field. Theoretical elaboration and analytical vocation are crucial in counteracting the uncritical naturalisation and widespread acceptance of political discourses and concepts that are associated with the educational ideologies produced by powerful IGOs. Without this theoretical capital, it would certainly be more difficult to intellectually resist the functional subordination of academic research to IGOs and also its co-optation by the 'research for policy' and 'problem-solving' approach, here under the more generalised formal rationality and instrumental character currently assigned to ALE.

Notes

1. Following UNESCO's (2015) definition, in the current article, we will use the concept adult learning and education to identify what has also been referred to by several authors as adult learning or adult education. This decision is made because UNESCO's definition of adult learning and education includes a wide range of policies, practices and research approaches that can be found in the articles analysed for the present article.
2. Although the debate about ALE as an academic discipline or field of practice throughout the twentieth century is well known, we share the view of Bron and Jarvis that see ALE as a 'young scientific discipline', usually a 'sub-discipline of education/pedagogy', where the 'learning of adults in formal, non-formal and informal settings constitutes a specific field of research' (2008, p. 38).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

ORCID

Licínio C. Lima ⓘD http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0899-7987
Paula Guimarães ⓘD http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2197-1004
Borut Mikulec ⓘD http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4500-3091

References

Bagnall, R. G., & Hodge, S. (2018). Contemporary adult and lifelong education and learning: An Epistemological Analysis. In M. Milana, S. Webb, J. Holford, R. Waller, & P. Jarvis (Eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook on adult and lifelong education and learning* (pp. 13–34). Palgrave Macmillan.

Bélanger, P. (2011). *Theories in adult learning and education*. Barbara Budrich Publishers.

Berne, R., & Stiefel, L. (1984). *The Measurement of Equity in School Finance: Conceptual, Methodological, and Empirical Dimensions*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bonnafous, L. (2014). Trans-nationalization of educational policy making: From European innovation projects in adult education to an emerging European space for lifelong learning: What model for the European vocational education and training policy? *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *33*(3), 393–410. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2014.891888

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Homo academicus*. Les Éditions de Minuit.

Bourdieu, P. (1994). *Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action*. Éditions du Seuil.

Bourdieu, P. (1997). *Les usages sociaux de la science. Pour une sociologie clinique du champ scientifique*. INRA.

Bron, A., & Jarvis, P. (2008). Identities of Adult Educators: Changes in Professionality. In E. Nuissl & S. Lattke (Eds.), *Qualifying adult learning professionals in Europe* (pp. 33–44). W. Bertelsmann Verlag GmbH & Co.

Casey, C., & Asamoah, L. (2016). Education and sustainability: Reinvigorating adult education's role in transformation, justice and development. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *35*(6), 590–606. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2016.1217281

Cavaco, C., Lafont, P., & Pariat, M. (2014). Policies of adult education in Portugal and France: The European Agenda of validation of non-formal and informal learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *33*(3), 343–361. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2014.896086

Centeno, V. (2011). Lifelong learning: A policy concept with a long past but a short history. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *30*(2), 133–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2010.547616

Clain, A. (2016). Challenges in evaluating the EU's lifelong learning policies. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *35*(1), 18–35.

Cort, P., Mariager-Anderson, K., & Thomsen, R. (2018). Busting the myth of low-skilled workers – Destabilizing EU LLL policies through the life stories of Danes in low-skilled jobs. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *37*(2), 199–215. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2017.1404501

Delors, J., Al Mufti, I., Amagi, I., Carneiro, R., Chung, F., Geremek, B., Gorham, W., Kornhauser, A., Manley, M., Padrón Quero, M., Savané, M.-A., Stavenhagen, R., Suhr, M. W. & Nanzao, Z. (1986). *Learning: the treasure within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the twenty-first century.* UNESCO.

Desjardins, R., & Rubenson, K. (Eds.). (2009). *Research of vs research for education policy: In an era of transnational policy-making.* VDM Verlag Dr. Müller.

Drisco, J. W., & Maschi, T. (2015). *Content analysis.* Oxford University Press.

Duke, C. (1982). Evolution of the recurrent education concept. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *1*(4), 323–340.

Elias, J. L., & Merriam, S. B. (2005). *Philosophical foundations of adult education.* Krieger Publishing Company.

English, L. M., & Mayo, P. (2021). *Lifelong learning, global social justice, and sustainability.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Faure, E., Herrera, F., Kaddoura, A. R., Lopes, H., Petrovoski, A., Rahnema, M. & Ward, F. C. (1972). *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow.* UNESCO.

Fejes, A., & Nylander, E. (Eds.). (2019). *Mapping out the research field of adult education and learning.* Springer.

Field, J. (2001). Lifelong education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *20*(1–2), 3–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/09638280010008291

Field, J., & Schemmann, M. (2017). International organisations and the construction of the learning active citizen: An analysis of adult learning policy documents from a Durkheimian perspective. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *36*(1–2), 164–179. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2017.1287920

Griffin, C. (1999a). Lifelong learning and social democracy. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *18*(5), 329–342. https://doi.org/10.1080/026013799293586

Griffin, C. (1999b). Lifelong learning and welfare reform. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *18*(6), 431–452. https://doi.org/10.1080/026013799293504

Guimarães, P., & Mikulec, B. (2021). The paradox of utilitarian recognition of prior learning: The cases of Portugal and Slovenia. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *12*(1), 109–122. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.ojsl1479

Hake, B. J. (2021). Mapping our way out? Critical reflections on historical research and the 1972 Faure report. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* ,*13*(2), 125–145. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.3584

Hart, C. (2018). *Doing a literature review: Release the research imagination* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings.* State University of New York Press.

Holford, J., Hodge, S., Milana, M., Waller, R., & Webb, S. (2021). Lifelong education international: Forwards and/or backwards? *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *40*(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2021.1904610

Lahire, B. (2017). Campo. In A. Catani, Ed., *Vocabulário Bourdieu*, (pp. 64–66). Autêntica.

Lawson, K. (1982). Lifelong education: Concept or Policy? *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *1*(2), 97–108. https://doi.org/10.1080/0260137820010202

Lee, M., & Friedrich, T. (2011). Continuously reaffirmed, subtly accommodated, obviously missing and fallaciously critiqued: Ideologies in UNESCO's lifelong learning policy. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *30*(2), 151–169. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2010.547619

Lengrand, P. (1970). *An introduction to lifelong education.* UNESCO.

Lima, L. C. (2007). *Educação ao longo da vida: Entre a mão direita e a mão esquerda de Miró.* Cortez Editora.

Lima, L. C. (2012). *Aprender para ganhar, conhecer para competir. Sobre a subordinação da educação.* Cortez Editora.

Lima, L. C., & Guimarães, P. (2011). *European strategies of lifelong learning: A critical introduction.* Barbara Budrich Publishers.

Mikulec, B. (2021). The influence of international intergovernmental organisations on Slovenian adult education policies. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *40*(1), 37–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2021.1871674

Murphy, M. (Ed.). (2013). *Social theory and education research: Understanding Foucault, Habermas, Bourdieu and Derrida.* Routledge.

Regmi, K. V. (2017). Habermas, lifeworld and rationality: Towards a comprehensive model of lifelong learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *36*(6), 679–695. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2017.1377776

Rubenson, K., & Elfert, M. (2015). Adult education research: Exploring an increasingly fragmented map. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *6*(2), 125–138. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9066

Szakos, E. F. (2014). Learning as renewal: Contribution to the present theoretical background of the lifelong learning policy of the European Union. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *33*(4), 504–522. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2013.876559

Tuparevska, E., Santibáñez, R., & Solabarrieta, J. (2020a). Equity and social exclusion measures in EU lifelong learning policies. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *39*(1), 5–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2019.1689435

Tuparevska, E., Santibáñez, R., & Solabarrieta, J. (2020b). Social exclusion in EU lifelong learning policies: Prevalence and definitions. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *39*(2), 179–190. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2020.1728404

UNESCO. (2015). *Recommendation on adult learning and education.* UNESCO.

Wain, K. A. (1985). Lifelong education and philosophy of education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *4*(2), 107–117. https://doi.org/10.1080/0260137850040202

Wain, K. (1993). Lifelong education and adult education — The state of the theory. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *12*(2), 85–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/0260137930120202

Willamo, R., Helenius, L., Holmström, C., Haapanen, L., Sandström, V., Huotari, E., Kaarre, K., Värre, U., Nuotiomäki, A., Happonen, J., & Kolehmainen, L. (2018). Learning how to understand complexity and deal with sustainability challenges – A framework for a comprehensive approach and its application in university education. *Ecological Modelling*, *370*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolmodel.2017.12.011