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Neoliberalism in Colombian education: A critical discourse analysis of the “Decennial National Plan of Education 2016-2026: the road to quality and equity”

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Neoliberalism in Colombian education: A critical discourse analysis of the “Decennial National Plan of Education 2016-2026: the road to quality and equity” Ariza Traslaviña, Adrian Mateo

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The communism vs neoliberalism battle is not new to Latin America, and after a long process, it has resulted in turning anything related to socialism/communism into a sort of taboo in Colombia. It is in this context that neoliberal ideas have had freeway in Colombian policies and reforms, reaching the point where, all of what those ideas represent, is taken for granted, mostly criticized in terms of their positive or negative results, but only in few cases, deeply analyzed and questioned for their ideological nature. For this reason, in this thesis I made a critical analysis of the neoliberal discourse present in the policy document “Decennial National Plan of Education 2016-2026: the road to quality and equity”, which is the “roadmap” for Colombian education for the decade 2016 – 2026. To do so, the second chapter presented a theoretical framework of the meaning of discourse and ideology, and their relation to social constructivism and institutions, mostly based on the theories developed by Michel Foucault, Norman Fairclough and Teun Van Dijk. The third chapter introduced neoliberalism as an ideology, to later show its history in Colombia and its education. Several national and international policies and documents that have been influential in the introduction of neoliberalism to the system, were presented from my perspective and the perspective of different Colombian authors. The following chapter presented my critical stance, to later show the methodology used to analyze the selected document, based on Critical Discourse Analysis. Finally, the last chapters showed my findings and conclusions.

While analyzing the document, I found four main points: (1) there is an important direct influence of multinational organisms from the creation to the final evaluation of the document; (2) the document presents a strong neoliberal lexicon; (3) education, *quality education*, and human development are presented as the solution to several socioeconomic problems; and (4) throughout the sections of the document, the neoliberal discourse goes through a “institutional machinery” that contributes to naturalizing it in the Colombian society. Finally, I presented a short critique on the lack of self-criticism of the discourse, as well as a critique to the hegemony of neoliberalism as the dominant paradigm.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, Colombia, Policies, Education, Critical, Discourse, Ideology.

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1. Introduction

The influence of neoliberalism has deeply transformed the cultures, economies and policies of many countries around the world, including in Latin America and especially Colombia. Supported by powerful multinational organisms, neoliberal reforms have been introduced in Colombia, in almost every sphere. These reforms have had a profound impact on education throughout the years, which have led to its current state and the creation of new policies to direct its future during the following decades. One of these policies is the document called “Decennial National Plan of Education 2016-2026: the road to quality and equity” (translated from its name in Spanish, “*Plan Nacional Decenal de Educación 2016 – 2026: el camino hacia la calidad y la equidad*”), which is supposed to dictate the horizon of the Colombian education for the upcoming years, in spite of possible changes in government that the country could face during the next presidential periods.

A quick review of Latin American history would reveal the inner battle (literal in many cases) that countries have gone through, by constantly switching between communist/socialist and neoliberal governments during the last century, as a proxy of the ideological conflict between the United States of America and the previous Soviet Union. In this regard, Ramos (2006, p. 407 – 425) in the book “History of the Latin American Nation” (from its name in Spanish, “*Historia de la Nación Latin-American*”), shows the historical process of the nationalist revolutions in Latin America that followed the European colonialism. For him, the Bolivarian idea of a unified America, boosted revolutions against the North American and European imperialism, as shown by the example of Mexico against USA (1846-1848). This was then transformed during the world war by the support of Soviet Union and USA to different countries, in an attempt to keep their hegemony. All this led, at a later date, to the “Cuban Missile Crisis” in 1962, which derived in the complete isolation of Cuba for supporting the communist ideology, and several economic and military impositions in most Latin America by the USA, in an attempt to prevent a “second Cuba”. The communist spirit then got relegated to the “Bolivarian Revolution” in Venezuela that continues until today.

As an example of this conflict, neoliberalism has clearly won in Colombia after more than 50 years of internal war, to the point that nowadays it is ingrained in the culture and in most institutions. On the contrary, Venezuela, the neighboring country, has moved through the last two decades towards a socialist state. Beyond the outcomes that these two “opposing” ideolo-

gies have brought to each country, this antagonism has resulted in both governments imposing a strong discourse against the other's ideology. In the Colombian case, socialism and communism are used as homonyms and neoliberalism is closely linked to democracy. The current Colombian president, Ivan Duque, supported by the menace of a military intervention of the USA, has categorized the Venezuelan Government as a "dictatorship", and everything related to it as a "crisis" that must be stopped at any cost. It could be said that thanks to this discourse, during the last presidential elections, he and his political party were able to defeat their main opponent Gustavo Petro by identifying him as the "Castrochavist menace"¹.

As mentioned before, the communism vs neoliberalism battle is not new to Latin America, and after a long process, it has resulted in turning anything related to socialism/communism into a sort of taboo in Colombia. It is in this context that neoliberal ideas have had freeway in Colombian policies and reforms, reaching the point where, all of what those ideas represent, is taken for granted, mostly criticized in terms of their positive or negative results, but only in few cases, deeply analyzed and questioned for their ideological nature. For this reason, this thesis will provide a critical analysis of the neoliberal discourse present in the policy document "Decennial National Plan of Education 2016-2026: the road to quality and equity". To do so, in the second chapter, I am going to present a theoretical framework of the meaning of discourse and ideology, and their relation to social constructivism and institutions. The third chapter will introduce neoliberalism as an ideology, to later show its history in Colombia and its education. The following chapter will present my critical stance, to later show the methodology used to analyze the selected document and the final chapters will show the findings and the final conclusions.

¹ "*Amenaza castrochavista*" in Spanish. "Castrochavist" is used to refer to the followers of the ideology resulting of the mixture between the Cuban communism of Fidel **Castro** and the Venezuelan Socialism of Hugo **Chávez**.

2. Discourse, ideologies, social constructivism and institutions

Michel Foucault, Norman Fairclough and Teun Van Dijk are three of the biggest exponents of discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis in the world. Michel Foucault focused his career in multiple areas of the power relations resulting of the use of language and discourse, for example; sexuality, justice, health, truth, among others (see *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings*). Norman Fairclough, using Foucault's and other important authors' ideas as a reference, developed theories about the critical analysis of discourse, with a special focus on the analysis of the text (See *Critical Language Awareness*). Teun Van Dijk furthered, even more, all this work into the power relations of ideologies and discourse, but he added the role of the manipulation of cognition to the connection between discourse and critical discourse (Dijk, 1993 p. 254). This thesis will mainly use their work as a reference to understand their ideas about discourse, ideology, social constructivism, power and Critical Discourse Analysis.

For Fairclough (1992, p. 28), discourse is language used as a social practice. He mentions speech or writing, but we can understand it as any form of language. It is the social component of language which transforms it into discourse. As mentioned by Foucault (1970, p. 66), unless it goes through three stages, language, at any point, is nothing but signs. He calls these stages; the "writing", the "reading" and the "exchange" (p. 66). Fairclough (1992, p. 10) developed this idea calling them "dimensions"; "writing" is the "Text" (language), "reading" it is the "Interaction" (a process of production and interpretation of the language between people) and the "exchange" is the "Social action" (placing it into its social context). Without these dimensions discourse could not exist, and in this way, it creates a "two-way relationship" where "discourse shapes and is shaped by society" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 8). One of the reasons for this, according to Fairclough (1992, p.8), is because "discourse constitutes the social" in the three social dimensions: "Knowledge, social relations and social identity". A current example to understand this, is the global discourse on climate change. Because of the reiterative discourse on this topic, more studies have been done, and more has been said and written about it, thus, it has created and shaped the "knowledge" about itself, its causes and consequences. Social relations are also created and changed because of it; new organizations have been established or have gained importance, education is preparing for this new panorama and people express their opinions about this in different ways. Social identities are also being constituted and transformed; new generations are formed aware of this topic, either they want it or not. People around the world and in their communities, position themselves in fa-

vor, neutral or against of this topic, and some other people or institutions are blamed or praised for their actions. All of this, also shapes the discourse, through new forms of change or reinforcement (i.e. new policies, speeches, media, manifestations, education, etc.)

An essential element in changing or reinforcing discourses is the role of institutions. We can understand institutions as those set of rules or norms that regulate the interactions of a specific social matrix. As mentioned by Pendersen (2009, p. 3) “discourse and institution[s] interact in the constitution of a social world, and [...] discursive practices are institutionalised or are moved from being linguistic utterances to set conditions for stable social relations”. For Foucault (1970, p. 55), what constitutes “truth” for example, “rests on and institutional support”. He says that pedagogy, the academic system and a “whole strata of practices” reinforce and constitute whatever is understood by a society as truth. According to him, this is important because “[i]n the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power” (Foucault, M., & Gordon, C., 1980, p. 94). Foucault (1970, p. 56), also says that “true discourse” cannot recognize that it has gone through a process of institutional machinery that has made it the “universal” truth it is. If we consider that truth is not the only discourse that we encounter every day but “several discourses are articulated simultaneously” (Pendersen, 2009, p. 3), then we can only imagine to a small extent, how big is that institutional machinery that acts upon all the multiple discourses that constitute our social reality. In this sense, the interaction of people through multiple discourses creates and shapes their reality. The interaction of people with objects is also constructed through discourse, as Foucault (1970, p. 67) specifies, saying that the world is neutral, “it is not accomplice of our knowledge” and we impose the discourse on it. Therefore, we are the ones who give meaning to objects and our social interactions, creating, the matrix of our reality.

2.1. Institutionalized ideologies

In order to make sense of that constructed world, people select fundamental ideas or beliefs that help them create an individual identity. For example, cultural values that they consider important, the way they understand the world or societal norms that they regard crucial. For Dijk (2006, p. 116), when collectivities of people share those social representations, thus creating a social identity, the belief systems they share can be called ideologies. But not all col-

lectivities develop an ideology (Dijk, 2006, p. 116). For example, people who live in a country, do not necessarily share their fundamental beliefs. Even if they do, they are not necessarily “defined primarily by their shared ideology and the social practices based on them” (Dijk, 2006, p. 120), only when this happens, they can be called an “ideological group”. As we will see later, neoliberalism is an ideology because people share fundamental beliefs about how the social and economic relations should work based on the freedom of the market. Other examples of ideologies are religions, because people share their beliefs around the creation of life or values and norms to live by. Political parties share a common understanding on how society should work and what is wrong and right, etc. As Dijk says: “Sometimes, ideologies become shared so widely that they seem to have become part of the generally accepted attitudes of an entire community, as obvious beliefs or opinion, or common sense” (2006, p. 117).

If an ideology can be taken for granted in a community or society, then, to control the discourse that shapes the ideologies is a matter of power. As Foucault (1970, p. 53) says, discourse “is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized”. For Fairclough (1992, p. 8-9), the relations of power determine the discourse, and this is invested with ideologies. Then, for example, in a school where the pedagogy is based on authoritarianism, students can only talk when given permission by their teachers. This act of exclusion or prohibition (Foucault, 1970, p. 52), is completely legitimized by an institutionalized power of dominance (Dijk, 1993, p. 255) that represents the event as an underlying value of the dominant ideology (Dijk, 1993, p. 272). For Dijk (1993, p. 255), this “organization of dominance also implies a *hierarchy of power*”. This means that some groups of people have more power than others in controlling the discourse. Dijk (1993, p. 255) calls them “power elites”. He (1993, p. 255) and Fairclough (1992, p. 9) agree that their power to make an ideology “taken for granted” can be measured to the extent to which they control the society, the resources or particular institutions.

According to Foucault (1970, p. 52), “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain amount of procedures to gain master over it”. As shown before, institutions have a crucial role in this. For him (1970, p. 64), any education system is a way to do so because of the way it ritualizes speech, qualifies and fixes roles, indoctrinates and distributes and appropriates discourse. Dijk (1993, p. 254) agrees by saying that “dominance may be enacted and reproduced by subtle, routine, everyday forms of text and talk that appear natural and quite acceptable”. Moreover, indoctrination

of discourse, “limits our understanding of the world” (Pendersen, 2009, p. 3) and binds people, restraining them from other type of discourses (Foucault, 1970, p. 52 & Pendersen, 2009, p. 3). In this context, it makes sense for ideological organizations to control the education. In the following chapter, it will be described how neoliberalism, institutionalized by powerful multinational organisms, has taken control over education. This will serve as the base to show in a subsequent chapter how that context, consequently, has influenced the creation of the Decennial National Plan of Education 2016-2026, and therefore, the future of the Colombian education.

3. Neoliberalism

3.1. From Liberalism to Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a new form (“Neo”) of the liberal ideology that flourished in the second half of the XVIII century. Liberal principles come from the fundamental belief of Liberty, hence, this ideology got called Liberalism. It comes as a result of the desire of people to get free of the authoritarianism of the monarchies that ruled in many places during the previous centuries. For Usuche (2002, p. 79), liberalism can be understood in different spheres and it followed seven main principles (p. 80): (1) society must be the result of free and interactive processes and there should not be any interference on those processes; (2) wealth distribution is a result of the market, it is fair and it should not be a goal; (3) the idea of a socio-religious utopia design is rejected, the process of the society should determine its outcome; (4) to have a free society is just natural; (5) there are not external morals, just opinions and the “market of opinions” will favor truth; (6) liberty is above good and bad, therefore, everyone should have equal rights; (7) people are equals in the participation of the society but they have unequal talents. As an example, Foucault and Gordon (1980, p. 153) mentioned that during the French Revolution, it was proposed that people could act as overseers of the others and express their opinions; therefore, “wrongdoers” would refrain from their acts without the need of the State’s vigilance. Another example is the concept of private property, Usuche (2002, p. 81) says that for liberals, a private place would secure people from the State’s intrusion. Also, in that way, people could be free to live however they wanted and do whatever they wanted with their possessions (p, 80). This meant, that they could trade their possessions, sell their work or invest their savings as they pleased (p, 80). However, he specifies (p, 81), that to have a market, there had to be at least three participants, where two of them would compete in their offers to the buyer, creating then an unconscious force of the market that would make it more efficient without the need for regulation. All these became the base of the principles that directed the economies and societies of many parts of Europe and USA during the following centuries.

According to Usuche, only until a few years before The Great Depression, the economic theory based on liberalism was questioned. Because it seemed that a free market was not able to keep a good balance, new alternatives where the State could have more regulation, or even a Welfare State, were proposed (2002, p. 81). Despite this, because of the Second World War,

the spread of these alternatives stopped, and through the Marshall Plan, USA and Europe joined as major trade partners to stimulate world trade, according to George (1999, p. 3). In this context, the creation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (which would later be controlled by the USA), the ideas of the American academy with the economists Friedrich Von Hayek and Milton Friedman and the political support of Margaret Thatcher in Europe and Ronald Reagan in the USA, set the conditions for and put into motion the “neoliberal revolution” (George, 1999, p. 3-10). For Usuche (2002, p. 84-85) that revolution followed five principles: (1) total freedom for businesses from Government or State regulations, with open international trade of goods, capitals and services and unregulated prices; (2) cuts on public expenditure; (3) deregulation of factors that could decrease private benefits; (4) privatizations; (5) and elimination of “common goods”. All this resulted in a system that revered competition above all, despite the inequality that it caused (George, 1999, p. 7), forcing people to live for the market (Usuche, 2002, p. 87), to the point where their value was based on their use as means of production (Jaramillo, 2013, p. 95). As well, as Esteva and Prakash said (as cited in Herrera & Viola, 2016, p. 39), it planted the illusion of a “global thinking” where several “hegemonic projects”, like the English language standardization (Fairclough 1992, p. 43, 51), were set into practice all around the world.

3.2. Neoliberalism in Colombian education

Fernández and Ochoa (2014, p. 281) mention that with the discourse of education as a “key stone” for development, multinational organisms as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization of American States (OEA) have intervened in the education policies of Latin American countries through programs and decisions (in form of recommendations), that have resulted in the loss of autonomy of these countries in the making of their own education policies. Similar to this situation, Usuche (2002, p. 88) says that in 1982 several Latin American countries, due to a financial crisis, had to negotiate new terms to pay their international loans, and they had to accept a neoliberal macroeconomic adjustment imposed by the IMF. In this regard, George (1999, p. 3, 11) mentions that the IMF changed from its initial purpose where it and the World Bank were supposed to act as funding organizations and mediators for international money and capitals needed for the reconstruction of destroyed countries during the war, to be a “quasi-universal dictator” of economic policies, thanks to the conditions that it applies over financed countries in exchange of loans. In the Colombian case, according to Usuche (2002, p. 90), since 1935,

when Colombia signed an unbalanced first free-trade agreement with USA, Colombia has been in a big financial crisis which has made it impossible to pay its financial debts (p. 88).

In 1987, the Government created the “Social Economy Plan” (from its name in Spanish, “*Plan de Economía Social*”), which led to the “Economic Openness” of 1990 that would be determinant for the economy and policies of Colombia during the following decades. This plan had three main goals to reform the economy: (1) “reorientation of public spending”; (2) “expansion of exports”; (3) and “growth of private investment” (Departamento de Planeación Nacional, 1987, p. 28). This document showed clear interest in following the neoliberal principles, reflected in its desire to improve efficiency, human capital, competitiveness and productivity, etc. (Departamento de Planeación Nacional, 1987, p. 17, 28, 30).

Education in Colombia has had a big transformation during the last century. Every four years, a new Government during their presidential period create their own “National Development Plan” (from its name in Spanish, “*Plan Nacional de Desarrollo*”) which describes the aims of the government for the economy, society and education during that period. This has been an obstacle for the progression of a clear project for the national education because each new government has different objectives and modifies small parts of the education system according to their perspective. For that reason, the “Decennial National Plans for Education” were created in an attempt to continue some projects over the years, despite the intervention of specific governments. This led to this point where the “Decennial National Plan of Education 2016-2026: the road to quality and equity” was published at the end of 2017. In order to see how neoliberal principles have impregnated this evolution, it is necessary to make a contextual tracking of the main laws that have influenced changes over the last decades.

From 1960 until 1990

According to Fernández and Ochoa (2014, p. 282), as an imposition of the United Nations, in 1963 Colombia made the Decree 1710, which regulated primary education, “inserting the notions of: capabilities, skills, learning [and] objectives”. In 1968, the “German Pedagogical Mission” (from its name in Spanish, “*Misión Pedagógica Alemana*”) arrived in Colombia to instruct teachers in their jobs and the creation of teaching materials (Fernández and Ochoa, 2014, p. 283). Related to this, Tikly (200, p. 36-38) reminds us that this kind of missions have evolved since the colonial era through the teaching of the bible, and he says that “given the continued hegemony of Western textbooks, materials, and resources, it is likely that a Eurocentric kind of education will continue in the schooling of most of the world’s children”. Lat-

er, in 1984, Decree 1002 (from its name in Spanish, “*Decreto 1002*”) established the curriculum for the levels of pre-primary, basic and vocational, which oriented education through the formulation of objectives and evaluation as a mean to improve quality (p. 1, 5). By 1988, Law 24 (from its name in Spanish, “*Ley 24*”) restructured the Ministry of National Education and ordered an administrative decentralization to take responsibilities from the Ministry and transfer them to regions and municipalities (p. 19). During these decades a technical education with clear objectives and evaluation for quality was promoted. Nussbaum (2010, p. 2) critiques this type of education because it is a way for nations to “pursue short-term profit by the cultivation of the useful and highly applied skills suited to profit making” in detriment of other social or cultural skills.

From 1990 until 1994

According to Soler (2011, p. 85, 86), in 1990 in the World Declaration on Education for All of the UNESCO, education was presented as an “engine for social change” and given an infinity of properties that made it the “panacea or the solution of all problems, individual and social”. In Colombia, the National Constitution was reformed in 1991, and the Article 67 declared education as a right and a public service, where the role of the State is to “regulate and exercise the supreme inspection and surveillance of education in order to ensure its quality” (Const., 1991, art.67), meaning that it is no longer their duty to provide education but only to inspect it. During the same year, the National Development Plan “The Peaceful Revolution” (from its name in Spanish, “*La Revolución Pacífica*”) was created with the “Plan for Education Openness” (from its name in Spanish, “*Plan de apertura educativa*”) which according to Usuche (2002, p. 96), set favorable conditions for the market system looking for efficiency and citizen participation. Also, he says that it determined five main goals: (1) universal primary education; (2) complementation between teaching and labor market; (3) decentralization of education administration; (4) efficiency and equity; (5) and to fund basic education while leaving the expenditure of higher education to the families, changing subsidies for loans. For Jaramillo (2013, p. 96), there is a clear orientation in this plan to make a triad “education, economy and development”, where the first one depends on the second, aiming to reach the third one. He also mentions the influence of neoliberal principles, quoting a part of the document where the director of the plan expresses “the importance of the human capital concept as a factor for growth and development”, saying that it “is probably the most important discovery of the economic growth theory on the last decade” (p.96).

In 1992, Law 30 (from its name in Spanish, “*Ley 30*”) organized the public service of Higher Education (Ley 30, 1992). Article 53 created the National Accreditation System (from its name in Spanish, “*Sistema Nacional de Acreditación*”) to guarantee and certify the quality of Higher education institutions. Articles 86 and 87 defined the funding for public universities as a responsibility of the State and the institutions’ own rent and resources. They also specified an annual increment at constant prices of the funding, based on the income and expenditure budgets from that year on, which was later reformed in 2010, to be an annual percentual increment based on the growth of the Gross Domestic Product. This increment was based on the “improvement of the quality of the institutions” according to pre-established objectives. Article 112 ordered to “strengthen the educational credit fund of the Colombian Institute of Educational Credit and Technical Studies Abroad” (ICETEX from its name in Spanish, *Instituto Colombiano de Crédito Educativo y Estudios Técnicos en el Exterior*), which oversees the regulation of loans and scholarships given to students. As well, Article 126 confirmed that private universities could receive funding from the State. All of this made universities’ funding dependent of the improvement of their quality, defined by State’s technical standards. Altogether, this resulted in a financial crisis for public universities up to this date. Because a great part of the public funding ends up in private universities through student loans and scholarships, and once public universities lack funding, it makes it harder to improve their quality to receive more funding.

These reforms coincide with the “recommendations” of multinational organisms that wanted to implement neoliberal ideologies in education during this decade. As an example, the World Bank (1995), through the “Washington Consensus”, developed an educational agenda, mostly visible in the document “Priorities and Strategies for Education”, where they set two main policies: (1) allowing the privatization of the school system, for the sake of getting new sources of funding (p. 5), improvement in enrollment (p. 43), and diversity and competition with public institutions (p. 71); and (2) improvement of Basic education by taking resources from higher levels, as the review of the document says: “because the gap between private and social returns is larger for higher education than for basic education, advantage should be taken of any willingness to pay for higher education by sharing the costs with students and their parents” (p. 103).

From 1994 until 2000

In 1994 Law 115 (from its name in Spanish, “*Ley 115*”) with Article 72 ordered the Ministry of National Education to create, at least every 10 years a “National Plan for Educational Development”, which were later called “Decennial National Plans of Education”. So far, three have been made, from 1996 to 2006, from 2006 to 2016 and the last one from 2016 to 2026.

In 1995, a National Development Plan “The Social Leap” (from its name in Spanish, “*El salto social*”) was created, with the education plan “The Education Leap” (from its name in Spanish, “*El salto educativo*”) for the presidential period 1994 – 1998. According to Jaramillo, in this document the mercantilist lexicon was naturalized with the notions of self-financial sustainability, rationalized expenditure, efficiency and quality services (p. 99), products, productivity, social capital, human capital, knowledge capital, and scientific and technological capital (p. 97). He also says that for the plan, internationalization and economic openness based on competition were fundamental, and it aimed to prepare more productive Colombians and to form and develop the “new citizens”. The excellent “citizens prototype” were those with higher levels of knowledge. For him, this document also made an explicit relation where “education leap” was the trampoline to reach the “social leap” (2013, p. 97). In this regard, Colclough (2012, p. 137) says that “the ‘education – poverty alleviation – development’ causal chain is problematic”, as other “universal links between education and particular sets of outcomes” because there are contextual differences that are not taken into account which transforms into error when generalized in other settings. Jaramillo (2013, p. 98-99) also mentions that in “The Education Leap” plan, with the support of the Law 188 of 1995, Government incentivized the evaluation of achievements and results in Higher Education by giving to the Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education (ICFES from its name in Spanish, “*Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior*”) the task to evaluate curricular plans. It is important to mention that this institution was already in charge of making the standardized national “SABER test” which is done in grades 3, 5, 9 and 11, that evaluate the subjects; Critical Reading, Mathematics, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, English, Quantitative Reasoning and Citizen Competencies, for which Grade 11 results are a determinant for access to university.

In 1996, the Regional Conference on Policies and Strategies for the Transformation of Higher Education in Latin America and The Caribbean was held. Soler (2011, p. 92-97) says that it put an emphasis on equity, quality, pertinence and internationalization. To compete with “in-

dustrialized” and “developed” countries, it encouraged universities to train “highly qualified” personnel. It also suggested autonomy for them but bound by evaluations. Flexibility, life-long education, entrepreneurship and scientific and technic creations were also concepts suggested for the new education. In Colombia, according to Fernández and Ochoa (2014, p. 289), in 1996 the Resolution 2343, which established the achievement indicators for curriculums of formal education, “was the most important instrument to coincide with the policies required by international organisms”, because it implemented “evaluation by competences, automatic promotion, achievement indicators and curriculum by projects”.

According to Tello (2013, p. 75), in 1988, the Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas (PREAL) in a document called “The future is at stake” (from its name in Spanish, “*El futuro está en juego*”), recommended governments give the school administration task to parents and communities, so governments’ focus could be to “generate funds, establish standards, promote equity, monitor progress and evaluate results”. The document also suggested that “Parents should be able to choose between schools that compete for students”. To close the decade, in 1999, the National Development Plan “Change to Build Peace” (from its name in Spanish, “*Cambio Para Construir la Paz*”) was created, which for Jaramillo (2013, p. 99), made *quality* an educational program where more standards and evaluations were implemented. For Tello (2013, p. 71), this decade was marked in all Latin America by the fragmentation of the education system due to the intervention of multinational organisms in their policies, having profound consequences on the exclusion of education of the most vulnerable. This is reflected in Colombia, for example, in the big disparity between the public and private education.

From 2000 until 2010

At the beginning of the XXI century, Tello (2013, p. 75) mentions that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in a document called “School autonomy: factors that contribute to a more effective school” (from its name in Spanish, “*Autonomía Escolar: factores que contribuyen a una escuela más efectiva*”), suggested governments to apply two strategies to positively improve education results: “administrative autonomy” and “pedagogic autonomy”. The first, by decentralizing governments’ task into schools, and the second, to make teachers more accountable through small pedagogic projects. He also mentions (2013, p. 74) a document of the PREAL in 2001, called “Staying behind” (from its name in Spanish, “*Quedándonos atrás*”), which remarked the importance of taking part in standardized international tests, be-

cause “social justice and international competitiveness demand that each country have a clear understanding of the performance of students”. In this sentence, the phrase “social justice [...] demand[s]” is a clear way of how mechanisms of discourse naturalize an ideological action, as an underpinning value of society. Foucault (1970, p. 55) mentioned that social sciences ground themselves on “true” discourse theories (as the theory of wealth and production or the theory of justice, the medical theory, etc.), in order to validate themselves and appear “natural”.

During the same time in Colombia, according to Soler (2011, p. 101-102), Law 115 of 2001 and Decree 1278 of 2002, “deprofessionalized the teaching career, eliminated salary guarantees and incentives to teachers, decreased the sum of pensions and layoffs and increased the working hours of teachers and the number of students per teacher in the classrooms”. In 2004, a document named “Educating Children in Poor Countries”, was published by the IMF. Velásquez (2015, p. 164) said that in this document the recommendation was to transform “the proliferation of poor, young and unemployed subjects, the perception of ‘the quality’ of education and the opportunity costs that it represents, both for parents, as well as for students from less favored social classes”. Foucault mentioned this issue back in 1980 (Foucault, M., & Gordon, C., 1980, p. 169) saying that this approach was an “utilitarian decomposition of poverty” where by giving all the “needed” (this included children (p. 172)) health and basic education, it made that investment profitable in long or short term, by making *them* “useful labor force”, thus enabling them to be part of the economic system.

The next important reform in Colombia was in 2007 through the National Development Plan “Community State: Development for All” (from its name in Spanish, “*Estado Comunitario: Desarrollo para Todos*”) for the period 2006 – 2010. Jaramillo (2013, p. 100) says that in this plan a new evaluation method was implemented for Higher education through the ECAES test (acronym of Higher Education Quality Examinations from its name in Spanish, “*Exámenes de Calidad de Educación Superior*”), making “evaluation the principal method to improve quality in education”. He criticizes that evaluation is used more as a measuring tool than a pedagogical component. As well, he remarks that the plan prioritizes the teaching of ICTs (Acronym of Information and communications technologies) and bilingualism (English) for teachers and students. Lastly, he also mentions that this plan proposed more equitable education with the intention of forming a higher number of people able to create jobs and businesses.

Soler (2011, p. 100–101) analyzed the “Decennial National Plan of Education 2006-2016”, also created in 2007, which is the previous version of the policy document that is going to be analyzed in this thesis. She found that the plan had a strong emphasis on decentralization and give autonomy to regions, which for Soler, would create inequality in regions with less resources, in access and quality for education. Also, she said that there was an “excessive emphasis on evaluation in all levels”, up to national and international standards, which for her, does not coincide with the principle of diversity, contradictorily stated in the document. She also mentioned that the several methods of evaluation created a panorama where all education institutions were controlled through strict mechanisms of “accountability”, thus making officials and teachers technocrats, with little time for criticality. Here, it is important to mention that one of the reasons for the government to increase their evaluation, is to achieve higher scores in the standardized PISA test, one of the requirements that Colombia had in order to belong to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Delgado, 2017, p. 70).

Since 2010

According to Velásquez (2015, p. 166), in 2013, the IDB published the document “Sectoral Operational Policies - Education Policy” which had three objectives that influenced Latin America: “1) train human resources for development; 2) increase equality of educational opportunities, and 3) improve the efficiency of investments in education”. For her, the document related human resources training with certification and occupation. In practical terms, this meant to “offer programs of technical education” and to allow Basic education graduates to work. In Colombia, the last National Development Plan done was "All for a new country" (from its name in Spanish, “*Todos por un nuevo país*”) for the period 2014-2018. Delgado (2017 p. 73-75) analyzed it, finding some major implications for education. He says that the plan is directed towards a globalization project that aims to strengthen democracy and prepare “capable individuals” to innovate using new scientific and technological tools. This, with the aim to belong to the OECD, meant a loss of autonomy for the country. He also found a strong emphasis on funding Basic education, which has been a reiterative policy from previous plans. Finally, the plan looks for better quality in education which forms “better human beings” capable of learn through life. This relates to the notion of “lifelong learning” which for Gewirtz (2008, p. 420, 422), has transformed in “living lo learn”, where people strive for “never-ending self-improvement”.

As we saw throughout this chapter, neoliberal principles impregnated all different levels of political norms to modify, from its very core, the education system in Colombia. Some of these principles are directly expressed by multinational organisms while some were the result of the influence of neoliberalism in the economy. In this chapter, the role of the discourse is seen in the very textuality of the norms. Some of them had explicit language with terms related to neoliberalism such as quality, efficiency, decentralization, productivity, standardization, evaluation, human capital, etc. and others had an implicit language where concepts were disguised in other terminologies. In most of these policy reforms, people unrelated to the higher spheres of government, had little to no decision-making power in their planning or implementation. And, in many occasions, those in power had no decision-making power either, because they were conditioned by multinational organisms. In this sense, Dijk (1993, p. 261) reminds us that this “[i]llegitimate control of the course of discourse [...] is a direct and immediate enactment of dominance, while limiting the discourse rights of other participants”.

4. Critical Stance

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach that goes beyond the mere analysis of a specific form of language. The *criticality* of the *discourse* is the main difference and the true essence of CDA. Foucault (1970, p. 70) and Dijk (2006, p. 280) agree with this by emphasizing the importance of understanding discourse, its root as language and later transformation through social interaction, as well as its implication in the creation of power relations enacted in society. Although for Foucault, the *critical* aspect resides in finding and understanding the “forms of exclusion, of limitation, of appropriation” produced by those power relations, for Dijk, it also needs the positioning and perspective of the analyst, which can be, “against the power elites and in solidarity with dominated groups”. He also remarks that it is not about seeing the elites as the “villains” but showing the disparity in their access to discourse compared to others and the susceptibility of the receivers of the discourse (2006, p. 280). In this sense, I position myself on the same perspective, and through this research, I have understood, in my opinion, the ways that neoliberalism has been institutionalized, through the power elites of multinational organisms, in the policies, and therefore, in the societies, economies, cultures and education of countries like Colombia. In this specific situation, it has been historically conditioned by unfair economic relationships with bigger economies, especially that of the USA.

As we saw throughout the previous chapter, only second to their economic influence, education policies have been the main way for multinational organisms to push neoliberal principles in Colombia. In this regard, I agree with Foucault (1970, p. 52), Jaramillo (2013, p. 93), Soler (2011, p. 94), Dijk (1993, p. 258) (2006, p. 133-134) and Velásquez (2015, p. 163) that education, mainly schooling, has a main role in reproducing the dominant hegemony, because it uses different ways to teach certain values, norms and principles from the first years of life, which later develop in internalized ideologies. Nonetheless, I also agree with Jaramillo (2013, p. 93) and Velásquez (2015, p. 163), to say that, in the same sense, education can also be a way to make a structural reform. It is for this reason that I analyzed an education policy document which will affect the future of education in Colombia, in order to express my subjective interpretation of the long contextual process that has led to the creation of that specific document, as well as my understanding of its discourse. This, as a modest “form of counter-power” (Dijk, 1993, p. 256) seeks to create consciousness about neoliberalism being a social

construction and not a natural “force” (George, 1999, 5), which may act as a form of social emancipation (Fairclough, 1992, p. 10) to change the Colombian society.

5. Methodology

In order to analyze the document called “Decennial National Plan of Education 2016-2026: the road to quality and equity” I understand CDA not only as an approach but also as a methodology. I see it in this way because it helped me understand the role that discourse has in shaping power relations and consequently the reproduction of ideologies like neoliberalism, as seen in the second chapter of this thesis. Also, as suggested by Fairclough (1992, p. 11) and Foucault (1970, p. 67), it made me realize the necessity of understanding the context that led to the creation of this document, which is the reason why the third chapter presents a contextual tracking of how neoliberalism influenced the creation of Colombian education policies over the last 60 years. Therefore, this constitutes one of the tools that I am going to use for the analysis. I am going to use all that context, to identify within the document explicit and implicit notions that represent principles of neoliberal discourse and other power relations created by that discourse. In this last regard, I am going to identify whose opinions are excluded (Dijk 1993, p. 260), who is allowed to speak (Foucault, 1970, p. 61-62), if there is polarization of ideologies (Dijk, 2006, p. 124), if there is a hierarchy of knowledges (Foucault, M., & Gordon, C., 1998, p. 82) (Rudolph, 2017, p. 81), what the Government’s interest is (Bacchi, 2000, p. 49), what are depicted as problems or solutions (Bacchi, 2000, p. 48), assumptions and what things are “hidden” or not mentioned (Bacchi, 2000, p. 48) in the document.

To support this analysis, I am going to identify how some linguistic forms are used in different parts of the text, for example, the kind of argumentation used, rhetorical figures, lexical style, if there is storytelling, the structure used (Dijk, 1993, p. 264), what is emphasized or de-emphasized, what is the degree of precision, granularity and level, and what modalities, evidentialities and disclaimers are used (Dijk, 2006, p. 125). Additionally, I am going to present a description of the document, to show how it is composed and structured, as well as the references used for its creation.

6. Findings

6.1. General specifications

The elaboration of the Decennial National Plan of Education 2016-2026 (DNPE)² was developed according to an inclusive and participatory process. The process included the orientation and validation of the Organization of American States (OEA) and the Regional Office for Culture for Latin America and the Caribbean of the UNESCO (ORCALC). Also, together with several education institutes and associations, the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) appears as one of the “Entities and leaders that design and write the final document” (p. 78).

Although the document is published and made by the Ministry of National Education (MEN from its acronym in Spanish), and is arguably the most important document published in education matters during that period, the document specifies that “The ideas expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position of the Ministry of National Education” (p. 4). This reflects, in a way, the lack of commitment of the institution with the project, because with a new government, the position of the Ministry, may change, therefore all the ideas written in the document can be invalidated.

The document was published in November of 2017, eight months before Juan Manuel Santos finished a presidential period that lasted eight years. This period was highly marked by the signing of the Peace Treatment in 2006 between the Government and the Guerrilla group FARC, which meant the end of an internal war that lasted more than 50 years. This made Juan Manuel Santos win the Noble Peace Prize and was a high boost for the international relations of the country. This period was also marked by the intention of the Government to belong to the OECD group, which was finally accomplished in 2018.

Out of 21 documents referenced, nine belong to multinational organisms, one document from CEPAL, one of them OECD, two of them UNESCO (one of them, the Millennium development goals), three of them United Nations, 2 referencing the International Covenant on Eco-

² Every time this document is referenced it will be alluding to the author: Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN) (2017a)

conomic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the other 12 reference either Governmental documents or foreign authors.

The document has 84 pages and is divided in nine sections: (1) Decennial National Plan of Education 2016-2026: the road to quality and equity (Introduction); (2) Framework; (3) Diagnosis of the current situation of education; (4) Methodology; (5) The strategic guidelines for the development of the challenges of the PNDE (acronym in Spanish for Decennial National Plan of Education) to 2026; (6) Monitoring and evaluation of the Decennial National Plan of Education 2016-2026; (7) Acknowledgments; (8) References; and (9) Glossary of acronyms. As well, the whole document is written in Spanish, therefore, all the translation will be subject to my interpretation.

6.2. First Section – Introduction

6.2.1. Simplification of the issue of education access

The second paragraph of page nine mentions that:

In 2011, free education was decreed, from transition to eleventh grade, so that the lack of economic resources ceased to be a barrier that prevented parents from taking their children to school. Currently, more than 8 million children and young people study for free and the educational system in preschool, primary and secondary reaches a coverage rate of 97%.
(p. 9)

The logical argument of this paragraph makes it seem as if the correlation between the *parents' lack of economic resources* and *access to education* is the only impediment for children to go to school, and therefore because education was declared free, the problem got solved. Even if education is free, the parents' lack of economic resources is still there, which, on occasion, forces children to work in order to get money to help their family, instead of going to school. According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (2019, p. 9) (from its name in Spanish, "*Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística*"), in the technical bulletin "Child Labor (CL)" (from its name in Spanish, "*Trabajo infantil (TI)*"), this was found as the main reason why children (between five and 17 years) work.

Free education does not solve other socioeconomic and cultural problems that prevent children and teenagers from going to school. For example, according to the Ministry of National

Education (2010, p. 3) (from its name in Spanish, “*Ministerio de Educación Nacional*”), the “National Survey of School Dropout - NSCD: Main results” (from its name in Spanish, “*Encuesta Nacional de Deserción Escolar – ENDE: Resultados principales*”) made in 2010, which was the first of its kind in Latin America, found that in Colombia, according to students between grade five and 11 of public schools, their reasons for dropping out of school were, among others, the distance of the school from their home; unsafe areas; areas with natural disasters; the lack of support in uniforms, transport and/or food; boring classes; lack of teachers; their interest in a different kind of education; violence or conflict at school; bullying; lack of money; death of a relative; housekeeping work or assistance to a relative; their family lack of interest in education; academic difficulties; they were about to be parents; etc. (p. 49, 54, 59) Therefore, even though, in the paragraph mentioned, it is implied that free education increased to 97%, the educational offer (“coverage rate”), not only did the government not solve or address the main problem that they identified for children not going to school (parents’ lack of economic resources), but the paragraph also reduces the problem to a single factor and blames parents for the initial situation.

6.2.2. Quality education for equality

Paragraph five of page nine, presents reasons why education is important, with something that Soler (2011, p. 80) calls “positive saturation of concepts”, which for her is a way to present a multiplicity of positive effects that something can have, in order to make it more appealing. So, the paragraph says that:

The governments of the world have set their sights on education as a powerful tool for transformation, which facilitates the strengthening of democracy, generates social mobility and reduces social and economic inequalities. The organization United Nations could establish, using data from 114 countries, between 1985 and 2005, that one more year of Education is directly associated with a reduction of 1.4 percentage points of the Gini Coefficient, the main indicator that measures inequality. (p. 9)

As we can see, education is attributed with transformation, strengthening of democracy, social mobility and reduction of social and economic inequalities.

The last part of the paragraph, referencing the United Nations, is not formally referenced or quoted in the document, even though it most probably comes from the document “Investment

Case for Education and Equity” published by UNICEF (2015), where in page eight of Chapter 1, they mention that:

Patrinos and Psacharopoulos (2013) in Lomborg (2013) demonstrated that there is a correlation between increasing the education level in a country, measured by average years of education, and decreasing income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient. Using data from 114 countries in the 1985–2005 period, they showed that one extra year of education is associated with a reduction of the Gini coefficient by 1.4 percentage points.

Here, the Colombian policy is using United Nations as a form of “reliable source” by attributing them a finding that is not really theirs, but of Harry Anthony Patrinos and George Psacharopoulos, both economists of the World Bank. Even more, in one of their documents (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos, 2011, p. 25-28) published by the World Bank, they explained this finding, but remarking, in a whole section called “Caveats”, that there are many contextual assumptions to reach this result, such as: “all countries are on the same production frontier”, “not capture[d] cross-country variation in growth of labor force participation or hours of work”, “[e]stimates of the returns to education [...] typically based only on wage earners and do not include the self-employed” and other “omitted variables”. Also, they say that “the cost of adding an additional year of schooling”, “the political environment”, “returns to education among the self-employed [being] lower than those of wage earners”, countries’ “physical and human capital stock”, “different culture and discipline towards study and work; quality of schooling; quality of institutions; quality of policymaking; openness of economy; democracy; civil rights; economic freedoms”, “investment rates, trade policies, colonial history, monetary policies, restrictions on markets”, “disequilibrium due to shocks caused by technology, prices, or other factors”, “industrialized” vs “developing economies” and “[c]ountries with bad institutions that create returns to corrupt actions”, are contextual variables to consider, that affect “the return to an additional year of schooling”. Therefore, the reference to the United Nations in the Colombian document is not only wrongly referenced but also decontextualized.

Due to the lack of definition on the meaning of *equality* and *quality education*, we could also argue the statements in paragraph four and five of page nine present a contradiction. If it is true that “a quality education increase[s] the possibilities of each individual to have better living conditions in the future”, an education of lower quality, or people who receive no education will have less possibilities for having better conditions, then education and different qualities of education, are a factor that creates inequality between people, and not the contra-

ry. Paragraph five supports this statement when it mentions that education is a tool for social mobility, implying that those with education move ahead in the “social stair” while those with no education would stay behind. This fits the situation of Colombia, at least when contrasted with the data of the National Administrative Department of Statistics (2018, p. 10), in the technical bulletin “Labor force and education 2017” (from its name in Spanish, “*Fuerza laboral y educación 2017*”) where it is shown that, in percentage of occupied people, a higher level of education means higher salaries, creating a significant disparity between levels, for example, among those with postgraduate studies and those with no education. Later, the document will mostly refer to *equity* while *equality* will be, in most cases, implied.

6.2.3. The purpose of education is external to the human

Paragraph four of page nine, gives away what is going to be the main focus of the policy: “But it is not just about improving access and permanence [...]”, as mentioned before, according to the document access is already improved up to 97% and improvement in permanence is explicit, but explained later in the document. Therefore, with these two almost solved, then “[t]he challenge is also to offer a quality education that increase the possibilities of each individual to have better living conditions in the future, to promote innovation, technological development, boost productivity and increase opportunities for progress for the regions”. Here, effects of education are depicted as external to the human condition. Quality education increases the chance “to have better living conditions in the future”. Although, it is not specified what those living conditions are, it is implied that those conditions are external to the person; through education, people themselves do not become “better” but their living conditions do. Also, it is assumed that the results are only visible in the future, thus all the possible effects of the process of education are neglected. Additionally, that externality of the results of education on the person, is reinforced with the subsequent argumentation where quality education is meant “to promote innovation, technological development, boost productivity and increase opportunities for progress **for the regions**”. Here, the neoliberal lexicon is also visible in terms like “quality”, “innovation”, “development”, “productivity” and “progress”.

Education in function of the economy

Paragraph one of page 10, mentions that the DNPE “is a road map to advance, precisely, towards a quality educational system that promotes the economic and social development of the country, and the construction of a society whose foundations are justice, equity, respect and

recognition of differences”. As we can see, economic development is the first thing mentioned as the purpose for having a quality education. This is then emphasized and more explicitly mentioned in paragraph six of the same page, saying that the DNPE “is a proposal for the education sector to become an engine that boost economic development and social transformation. The guiding nature of this document makes it a beacon that guides the strategies, plans and educational policies during the next decade”. This part not only shows the importance of economy but also shows the intention of making the “education **sector**” its engine. In this sense, education is placed in function of the economy. This first section of the document shows explicitly and implicitly that education is a tool for economy in the look for improving some neoliberal principles, as innovation, development, productivity and progress/development.

6.3. Second Section - Framework

6.3.1. First Part – International references/ Influence of multinational organisms

The first part of this section is called “The Right to Education” and shows the references that Colombia has, to define education. In a first instance Douglass North and Amartya Sen, both Nobel Prizes in economic sciences, are quoted to say that:

There is a consensus around education as a fundamental element to guarantee the full enjoyment of human rights. Education also has an impact on the social, economic and social development of nations, as it is an engine of equity, social mobility and strengthening of institutions (North, 1990), and is the most effective tool for the expansion of capabilities in individuals (Sen, 1999). (p. 11)

Again, as in the previous section, education is considered a tool and its purpose is to have positive results on different areas for the sake of the nation.

Afterwards, in this section, it is mentioned (p. 11) the “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” to remark the article 13, by which the countries that took part of the covenant “recognize the right of every person to education” and agree where education should be oriented towards and its purpose. Because this document is legally binding, Colombia has an obligation to promote the realization of these agreements since 1966 when the Government signed it. Additionally, the section continues referring to the World Education

Forum held on Dakar in 2000, where 164 countries, including Colombia and some multinational organisms and organizations such as the United Nations, IMF, United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Economic Community for Africa (UN AEC/CEA), UNESCO, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), World Bank, African Development Bank, Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND), Asian Development Bank, *Commission économique pour l'Afrique* (Economic Commission for Africa), OECD, Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI), among others (Pepler-Barry & Fiske, 2000, p. 51 – 83), agreed to six main objectives under the initiative Education For All. In this section, the Colombian document briefly mentions these objectives which strived for (1) increasing Early Childhood Education; (2) access, quality and permanence for vulnerable children; (3) attention to learning needs; (4) increment of coverage especially for women and adults; (5) gender equality in education; and (6) more measurements on education “especially in reading, writing, arithmetic and essential practical skills” (p. 11-12). The document does not mention, though, other objectives of the Forum emphasizing, for example, the knowledge, skills and values “needed for a successful living”, the importance and recognition of the World Bank and IMF in “helping” in-debt poor countries, the contribution of business community and private sector to basic education, strategies for decentralizing and privatizing education textbooks, the recognition of humans as financial contributions for education resources, “building effective partnerships with funding agencies”, among others (Pepler-Barry & Fiske, 2000, p. 23-26).

To conclude the first part of this section, the DNPE mentions (p. 12) the 4-A scheme made by Katarina Tomasevski, designated by United Nations, which proposed four dimensions for education, based around Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Adaptability. Then, the document (p. 13) makes a comparison to show how the High Court of Colombia in Sentence T-779/11 of 2011, ratified these four dimensions adapting them to the Colombian laws. Additionally, the document says that:

The country must also advance in the fulfillment of the agreements signed in various international pacts, such as those that have been set in the World Conferences of Education of UNESCO and the Sustainable Development Goals SDGs, which in educational matters has been set as a goal ‘[g]uarantee an inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’. (p. 13-14)

This section of the document joined to the third chapter of this thesis, is a substantial demonstration of how major multinational organisms have had a direct implication in the Colombian education policies and consequently in the DNPE, many of them introducing neoliberal principles and practices to the education system. This is an example of the “hierarchy of power” mentioned by Dijk (1993, p. 255). It shows how these “power elites” (UNESCO, IMF, OECD, etc.), through the possession of resources and the institution of *education*, have introduced the neoliberal principles and practices in countries like Colombia who have lost control of their own decisions and have become dominated in the hierarchy.

6.3.2. Second Part – “Orientation Document” / Institutionalized discourse through hidden mechanisms

The second part of this section shows the “Orientation Document”, made by the “Academic Commission”, used as the “roadmap” for creating the DNPE. The “Academic Commission” was a group of 35 people, “experts at the highest level in education, science, technology and innovation” (p. 32). The “Orientation Document” presents five main principles for the DNPE, what its *vision* should be for 2026, what its definition of quality education should be for 2026, 10 points constituting the expectations of Colombians on education for 2026, the legal support of the DNPE and 10 main challenges identified for 2026 considering all the previously mentioned. As the five main principles, it is mentioned (p. 14–15) that the DNPE must (1) help to construct peace and create a national feeling; (2) boost human development, integrality, sustainability and equity of education; (3) reduce inequality; (4) boost and guarantee the participation of public and private institutions in education; and (5) widen the scope of education, and all different education agents must be convinced that “educational programs and projects are the central axes on which the country can achieve compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations”. Here, the importance of the private sector in education is reaffirmed and once again, the influence of a multinational organism, in this case the United Nations, has a direct impact on the goals of the Colombian education policies.

For the *vision*, they stress the importance of Colombians creating a national identity with critical thinking, among other qualities, respectful of cultures and environment, and participants of democracy, global networks and internationalization processes (p. 15). For *quality education* it is understood as multidimensional, able to reach the goals of a progressing society, making it competitive in the world. Also, it must be in constant improvement and contribute

for equity. Although these two aspects, *vision* and *quality education* mention the importance of the national identity, this is only conceived in a globalized context, which gives more reason to adapt to international standards, in order to make Colombian education competitive at the international level.

Expectations of Colombians on education for 2026

Regarding the *expectations of Colombians on education for 2026*, the DNPE mentions that they are based on the consultation of more than one million Colombians in the form of surveys and *forums*. For the surveys, the methodological section of the document explains that they were made in person and online, to try to reach the biggest number of participants (p. 36). Nonetheless, the same section shows a map with the participants' distribution by region of the Great National Survey (p. 37) and there are clear differences in the number of participants, visible for example in some of the most central regions like Bogotá, Antioquia and Risaralda with 43.841, 34.595 and 27.338 participants respectively, compared to peripheral regions like Choco, Vaupés, Amazonas, Vichada, Guaviare and Guainía with only 883, 761, 230, 196, 194 and 74 participants respectively. This means that from 284.614 people who participated in this survey, 37% come from 3 regions out of 34 (including Colombians who are not residents in the country). It is also important to mention that, according to the methodological section (p. 33), more than 6.000 children participated through drawings.

Forums and methodology

Regarding the *forums*, although they are mentioned several times in the third and fifth sections of the document, it is not explained how they happened. Another document called "Methodology for the Realization of Forums of Construction of Strategies, Inputs for the Editorial Commission of the Decennial National Plan of Education" (from its name in Spanish, "*Metodología para la Realización de Foros de Construcción de Estrategias, Insumos para la Comisión Redactora del Plan Nacional Decenal de Educación*"; from now on, addressed as the document Methodology for Forums), available in the webpage of the DNPE, explains their purpose and the methodology for conducting them for those interested. That document (2017b, p. 3) mentions that the forums are activities like workshops, meant to allow the participation of the community into building strategies that help to overcome the challenges defined during that activity, which is based on education themes reflecting the interest of the one who organizes the forum. The themes are either, of the own creation of the holder of the fo-

rum, explaining what the concept is, its relevance for the education of the country and its purpose, or preselected themes defined by the Ministry of National Education (2017b, p. 10). These preselected themes are shown in a different document called “Glossary of Categorized Themes” (From its name in Spanish, “*Glosario de categorías temáticas*”), also available in the webpage of the DNPE, with some themes such as “Quality initial education”, “Evaluation with a formative approach”, “Promoting quality parameters”, “English for teachers”, “English for students”, “Strengthening technical and rural technical media”, “Socio-Occupational Orientation”, “Inclusion of the productive sector within the framework of technical media”, “Learning Throughout life”, “Articulation of secondary education with higher education and training for work and human development”, “Quality and pertinence”, “Qualification”, “Financing the demand of Higher Education”, “Promote technical education”, “Strengthening of the inspection and surveillance”, “Internationalization”, “Regionalization”, “Incorporation of the Own Indigenous Educational System to the Colombian legal system”, “Training and formation in the components of the Own Indigenous Educational System”, “Extracurricular activities”, “Extension of teaching time”, “Evaluation of teaching performance”, “Promoting educational quality”, “Training for Teachers' excellence”, “Strengthening of basic competences”, “Strengthening 21st century competencies”, “Involving parents in education”, “Innovation projects”, “Monitoring system”, “Monitoring and control of the quality of education”, “Homework and tasks at home”, among others (2017, p. 1–16). As we can see, the ones exposed here reflect the interest on quality, evaluation, competences, the education-labor relation, internationalization, decentralization, among other neoliberal principles that I have previously discussed.

The document, Methodology for Forums, also explains that there are two types of forums, those held by the Ministry of National Education (MEN) in town, region and country levels, and those held by individuals or organisms different to the MEN (2017b, p. 4). The latter group got called “Strategic Allies”, although it is not mentioned who constituted it at the end. The ones held by the MEN, were in charge of the “Commission of Regional Support”, which according to the DNPE (p. 32) was constituted by 92 delegates of the certified Secretaries of Education of the country. According to the document Methodology for Forums (2017b, p. 12-15), besides from the requirement regarding the themes of the forums, there were four other requirements needed for the Strategic Allies to hold a forum: (1) use the official registration formats; (2) use either the methodology used by the MEN, “Design Thinking”, or other methodology under specific criteria; (3) have a minimum of 80 participants if the theme is not one

of those preselected by the MEN, or 25 if it belongs to that category; and (4) before, during and after the forum, promote it using a specific Hashtag in Twitter. These requirements pose some implications. The final requirement is a barrier for people who do not belong to that social media, thus notably reducing the amount of people able to hold one of those forums. Also, access to internet becomes a barrier. The third requirement makes it harder for people to discuss themes other than those preselected by the MEN, which as mentioned previously, many of them reflected neoliberal principles. The second requirement, although the “Design Thinking” methodology is optional, it was the one used by the MEN, and it is a business methodology used for designing products, based on innovation and efficiency, as mentioned by the same document (2017b, p. 6). Although the DNPE (p. 35) mentions that 6.538 forums were held, it is not mentioned how many were held by the MEN and how many by Strategic Allies, or who they were. All these different requirements, directly or indirectly, may have had an effect in either, the Colombians' participation in the forums' processes, or in subtly introducing neoliberal values in the expectations of Colombians, consequently influencing the creation of the rest of the DNPE and its effects.

Final influence on the “Expectations of Colombians on education for 2026”

According to the DNPE (p. 15–16), Colombians want *education* that must be of quality, must be articulated to the productive vocation of the regions, and be pertinent and transversal with technology. Also, it has to respond to regional labor needs, to improve the quality of life and income of Colombians, to create equity, equality, social mobility, peace and human development. As well, *quality* must come from resources, and must result in equity, human development, economic development, international competition and coverage. Finally, *human development*, should close social gaps, achieve equity, consolidate peace, improve the quality of life of Colombians and achieve sustainable development and it must come from quality and teachers' professionalization, continuous learning and training. In this section, out of the 10 expectations presented, *quality* education is mentioned in five of them, and *human development* in three. Also, it is visible that *education*, *quality* and *human development*, are intertwined, as all of them must produce equity and development (either human or economic).

In this sense, these neoliberal principles, *quality education* and *human development*, are presented, according to the document, as the expectations of Colombians, which seem to be the solution for almost all the problems of the country. This makes it “almost impossible to question or oppose” them (Soler, 2011, p. 85) and therefore are easily accepted and even encour-

aged by the society. Thus, quality in education and all the neoliberal discourse, is now not only institutionalized and supported by the multinational organisms and the Colombian government, but it is also desired by the Colombians. To finish this section, the DNPE mentions (p. 17) that based on all the participation of the community and the knowledge and experience of the Academic Commission, they proposed 10 challenges of Colombian education for the decade, which will be the subject of the Sixth Section.

6.4. Third Section - Diagnosis of the current situation of education / Institutionalizing neoliberal education grounded in statistics

This section (p. 21–28) shows the current state of education in Colombia, up to 2016, in five main categories: (1) Access and Coverage; (2) Permanence; (3) Quality; (4) Pertinence; and (5) Funding. It is mentioned that to analyze the performance of each category, there are used *indicators* given by the OECD and evaluations done by the Ministry of National Education in *education achievements*. As well, the section shows the main focus of the two previous DNPE. In each of the five categories, some statistics are presented to present positively things that have improved, although many other things are not mentioned, which makes the statistics seem better than what they actually are. This may prevent the government and other observers from seeing failures in the system or linking them with other factors which might not be the real root of the problem. The first four categories are each divided into two, (1) Pre-Primary, Basic and Media, and (2) Higher education.

6.4.1. Access and Coverage

For Pre-Primary, Basic and Media it is shown that *coverage* decreased “from 100.51% in 2006 to 97.2% in 2016 [...] mainly because a decrease of population in those ages and the deputation of records at territorial levels” (p. 21). For one part, this implies that the systems of records are not reliable because the deputation of records change the statistics. For the other, it shows that the statistic shown in the *First Section* about coverage reaching 97% from the first school level, transition, to the eleventh grade, thanks to free education since 2011, is deceiving, because gross coverage actually decreased even though the free education in those levels was established. Also, this part mentions (p. 22) that “there are still gaps in access to quality education, mainly between socio-economic groups and urban and rural”, but those numbers are not given.

For Higher Education, the document mentions that to increase coverage, the demand on education was financed through education loans and shows statistics to show how many students were “benefited” by this. Nonetheless, as explained in a previous chapter, the financing of demand has been one of the historical reasons for the financial crisis of education, and also for the situation of several students who enter the labor market in-debt due to the big loans they accrue, as well as the lack of chances for some students who cannot afford to get loans to enter to the best and most expensive institutions (Suárez, 2014, p. 146, 149).

6.4.2. Permanence

For Pre-Primary, Basic and Media it is presented data only for the Primary level saying that for that level:

the greatest drop in the number of dropouts was obtained in the decade, going from a rate of 6.15% in 2006 to 3.02% in 2016. The total rate of national desertion also dropped from a 5.84% in 2006 at a rate of 3.72% in 2016. In other words, in the last six years, around 190,000 students have been prevented from leaving classrooms. (p. 22-23)

Although this is a positive effect, data is only presented for a specific aggregate, leaving aside the disparity in permanence in other aggregates, as shown by the Ministry of National Education in 2010 (p. 20), between the percentage of permanence of students in Rural (86.4) vs Urban (88.7) or in the lowest socio-economic stratum (86.2) vs the highest (92.9), or between the ones who belong to an ethnic group (85.5) and those who do not (88.1).

Also, the “School Feeding Plan” (from its name in Spanish, “*Plan de Alimentación Escolar (PAE)*”) tasked to the different regions is mentioned, as a positive effect for promoting permanence. Nonetheless, it is not mentioned that several cases of corruption that have happened regarding this Plan. The Office of the Attorney General of Colombia (from its name in Spanish, “*Colombia, Fiscalía General de la Nación*”), which is an institution that is part of the judicial branch tasked to prosecute offenders and investigate crimes, established that the PAE became a commodity for corruption and therefore started investigating several situations leading to the judgement and capture of different persons, both from the public and private sectors, including majors, education secretaries and contractors, as mentioned in the bulletins 23972 (2018), 25067 (2018a), 25100 (2018b), 25531 (2019b), 25756 (2019), 26490 (2019a).

This alludes to the idea that decentralization does not always mean efficiency, especially in contexts like Colombia where corruption has permeated most spheres.

6.4.3. Quality

For Pre-Primary, Basic and Media, programs are mentioned (p. 23-24) that helped teachers in the classrooms and an increase of the number of teachers with postgraduate degrees is also mentioned. The rest of this part is focused on improvements in the results on the “SABER” and PISA tests, although mentioning that there are still gaps in rural and urban students’ achievements as well as regarding socioeconomic strata.

For Higher Education, it mentions (p. 24) that more students were evaluated with the SABER Pro test, which reflects the importance that the Government gives to standardized assessments as a method for improvement in quality education, despite of the gaps in the lower levels. Additionally, it is mentioned that the number of high-quality certified undergraduate programs and institutions increased in the country reaching 896 in 2016 (p. 25), focusing on the almost parity between the increment in public and private institutions. Nonetheless, it does not mention that this is a small fraction of the 7528 current undergraduate programs existing in the country, according to the data of the National Higher Education Information System (from its name in Spanish, “*Sistema nacional de información de la educación superior SNIES*”) (2019), even accounting for the possible increment on programs between 2016 and the date. This means that the high-quality education the Government has mentioned several times, at least in the Higher level, is only restricted to a small portion of the offered programs. Thus, implying that there is a big disparity in quality and consequently, in its outcomes for people.

6.4.4. Pertinence

In this section, pertinence is defined as the coherence between reality and the education project (p. 25). This section focuses mostly on projects for indigenous people and minorities for Pre-Primary, Basic and Media, but I will discuss it later in the Fifth Section during the Fifth Strategic Challenge. Additionally, this part mentions that there were included more teachers for children with special needs and more funding.

For Higher Education, it is mentioned (p. 26) that to solve the problem of quality education in remote areas, one of the solutions has been to send students to study on urban areas or allowing them to make take one part of their education in their area and then moving to another. This poses a problem because in most cases, education or quality education is focused in the central regions of the country, adding to the inequality of the education between regions. It is also mentioned that “pertinence has also focused on the orientation of the offer towards the needs of the labor market” (p.26), which has been one of the main neoliberal approaches since the beginning.

For the *Funding* section, it is mentioned how funding has improved during the years, as a top priority of Government expenditure (p. 27). Regarding the *Previous DNPE*, it is mentioned (p. 27-28) that they also focused in improving quality, equality, decentralization, boosting of the administrative system, teachers’ evaluation, reforming the curriculum and participation of the community in the creation of the Plans.

Likewise, to what Foucault (1970, p. 55) stated, on how social sciences ground themselves on “true” discourse to appear natural, in this case, the neoliberal discourse of this whole section, grounds itself on statistics to show how good its effects are and the positive outcomes that it has in different areas of society thanks to education. Even though it mentions the “gaps” between urban and rural areas and between socioeconomic strata, no data is shown to explain this situation. Neither, it is questioned or addressed the possible implications of the system in creating those gaps. Moreover, inequality, which is a more telling term for *gaps*, besides being mentioned two times in international references, is only mentioned two times in the whole DNPE, which shows how much the topic is avoided, possibly because of the biggest inequalities that this system has in the country. Several problems in all the other categories of this section were not mentioned, maybe intentionally or because a lack of space, but the section presented a clear positive description of the “improvement” of the system. Using the same methodology of showing statistics, I tried to show issues that are not mentioned in this section, not to make a negative generalization of the system, but to show that depending how discourse is presented, it affects its interpretation. Finally, the *Fourth section* of the DNPE shows the methodology used for its creation, which I have already explained to some extent and which I will discuss further in the Fifth section.

6.5. Fifth Section - The strategic guidelines for the development of the challenges of the DNPE to 2026 / Institutionalizing neoliberalism through policy documents

With the 10 challenges proposed by the Academic Commission, the “Management Commission” with the help of the Commission of Regional Support, created the “Strategic Guidelines for the Development of the DNPE challenges to 2026” (from its name in Spanish, “*lineamientos estratégicos para el desarrollo de los desafíos del PNDE a 2026*”) that show, feasible strategic and specific guidelines to approach each of the 10 “Strategic Challenges”, during the following decade. The Management Commission is constituted by 126 organisms and has the task to “monitor the correct execution and management of the Plan, leading the evaluation processes of the Strategic Challenges established in the document” (p. 30). This commission is constituted mostly by Colombian private and public education institutions and associations, as well as Government institutions and the UNDP and UNICEF (p. 73–77). In this section all challenges emphasize, to some extent, the importance of quality, equity and decentralization but some do not provide much more material to make a further analysis in terms of their neoliberal content, therefore, I will mention those which I consider can be further developed.

6.5.1. First Strategic Challenge: regulate and clarify the scope of the right to education

The document mentions that this challenge is about:

The formal creation of a permanent commission that promotes and coordinates the national and territorial dialogue on the nature and scope of the right to education and on the conditions and strategies that make it effective, with the leadership of the Ministry of National Education and with the participation of delegates from academia, educational and research institutions, the Department of National Planning and associations of educators and students, among others. (p. 39)

Within its tasks, the commission would have to promote dialogue in local, regional and national level, promote social pacts, joint family, society and State for the sake of education, promote reforms, “human development and the generation of knowledge through quality education, relevant to social, economic, environmental and cultural contexts”, “establish alliances with public and private economic sectors”, among other, that are already responsibility of the

Ministry of National Education. In this sense, this challenge is just a deeper form of decentralizing the responsibilities of the State in new levels.

6.5.2. Second Strategic Challenge: the construction of an articulated, participatory, decentralized educational system with effective mechanisms of consensus

This part mentions (41–43) the creation of a system to guarantee quality in all different levels with permanent vigilance. Also, it mentions once again a deeper form of decentralization. It emphasizes the cooperation of the ministry with the education community, academics, and other sectors and agents to articulate a decentralized flexible system in all different levels and contexts, to promote internationalization, development in all different forms, and the spread of the system of vigilance of quality to all sectors, “labor, health, social security, science and technology”, etc. and the strength of the “interoperability” of the system of information.

6.5.3. Fourth Strategic Challenge: the construction of a public policy for the education of educators

This challenge (p. 45–49) is mostly focused on creating a standardized profile for teachers in their different forms and levels. For this, it is mentioned the establishment and definition of competences that educators must have. Also, it is mentioned the strengthening of quality programs for the training and formation of teachers and necessity of defined criteria and conditions for that quality. Additionally, it is mentioned the evaluation of teachers according to their different roles, and the promotion of lifelong learning and the “best practices” and pedagogies, with special emphasis to international mobility and indicators.

6.5.4. Fifth Strategic Challenge: to promote an education that transforms the paradigm that has dominated education so far

For this challenge, during the *Second Section*, it is mentioned that the proposal is to:

promote an education that transforms the paradigm that has dominated education up to now; that, beyond a pedagogy based on the transmission of information, is oriented towards human development and the integrality of a formation that contributes to the construction of a nation in a context of cultural and social diversity and of increasing internationalization. (p. 18)

The *Fifth Section* goes deeper, saying that:

It is necessary to promote a profound change in the pedagogical model and broad support and encouragement of educational innovations in the country. That is why it is necessary to promote creativity in the classroom, so that innovators have the necessary support to ensure the systematization, evaluation and monitoring of their experiences, in order to define how and in what conditions these can be generalized. (p. 49)

Even though the first paragraph talks about contributing to the creation of a country in “cultural and social diversity”, the second paragraph talks about systematizing and generalizing. Then, the idea of changing the dominant paradigm, described as the one based on transmission of information, is just for the sake of establishing a new dominant paradigm where the experiences of innovators can be constantly assessed in order to be systematized and generalized under clear conditions.

Then, in the specific guidelines (p. 50–52) the need for diversity and inclusive education is coherent with the different contexts of the country is emphasized. Nonetheless, during the *Third Section* while talking about the improvement on the Pertinence on education (p. 25), it shows education projects that have been created for all the indigenous tribes, the *Afro-Colombian, negra, palenquera* and *raizal* populations and the *Rom* community. Even though this may seem coherent with the purpose of diversity in the system mentioned before, these projects are still considered as special or unique for the ethnic communities, which is a way to show that those do not belong to the mainstream education and are relegated to closed communities. This is what Rudolph (2017, p. 81) and Foucault and Gordon (1998, p. 82) described as a hierarchy of knowledges, stressing on how these kind of knowledges seem to be less valuable, because they do not follow the “best practices” or are not sufficiently ground in sciences, therefore becoming marginalized. This Strategic Challenge also mentions (p. 50-52) the importance of the formation for productivity, the necessity of evaluation, the promotion of the skills needed for the XXI century emphasized on internationalization and the objective of recognizing and praising the “good practices in educational innovation of the different actors of the system.”

6.5.5. Eighth Strategic Challenge: to prioritize the development of rural populations by means of education

This challenge (p. 58–62) besides, once again, mentioning the need of quality, the training of teachers, the flexibility of the system and the intent to create equality, mentions the importance to “[p]romote the recuperation of local and ancestral knowledges through intercultural dialogue in order to include them in pedagogical practices at all educational levels”, as well as the need to “[e]laborate, design and implement SABER tests that include and acknowledge local contexts in order to bridge the gap between the rural and the urban.” The first point is related to the critique of the previous challenge. If the interest is to recover local and ancient practices to include them in all education levels; why is this mentioned in the challenge focused in the rural areas and not as a main point for the whole nation-wide education reform, or even in the challenge to change the paradigm? This, once again, tells how these “kind” of knowledges are marginalized to a specific area. The second point shows a similar approach when adapting the SABER test to the rural context. If the adaptation is about making the same test focused in mathematics, science and language but with questions focused on the specific rural context, then it is just a way to continue the same paradigm but with more *pertinence*. If the adaptation is about changing the test so the evaluation is around practices and knowledge of the rural areas, then these “kind” of knowledges are again marginalized to this context.

6.5.6. Ninth Strategic Challenge: the importance accorded to education by the state will be measured by the participation of education expenditure in the GDP and the government expenditure, on all administrative levels

This challenge (p. 62–64), could be by itself a good summary of most of the neoliberal practices and values introduced in the education system in Colombia: efficiency, decentralization and private influence, standardization, vigilance and evaluation and internationalization.

In terms of efficiency, it proposes to: “design and implement efficiency policies with regards to expenditure”; and “elaborate indicators of relevancy and efficiency with regards to expenditure in education.”

In terms of decentralization and private influence, it proposes to: “create an overseeing group responsible for inspecting, controlling and verifying the use of project resources and ensure

transparency with regards to investments”; “decentralize public resources for education towards educational establishment and increase levels of regulation, vigilance and control”; “search for strategies to promote and incentivize with great importance the investment and financing in education, allowing for a diversification of the financing sources of education”; and “design, create and implement strategies that allow the business sector to participate through directing their resources to financing educational activities and projects allowing the improvement of educational quality on all levels.”

In terms of standardization, it proposes to: “standardize costs of quality education”.

In terms of vigilance and evaluation, it proposes to: “create regional bodies that permanently follow and observe the quality of education and the relationship between investments and results”; “design and implement a management system that will allow tracking and analysis of the most relevant indicators of the country, both quantitative and qualitative in order to make efficient decisions and take quick actions to improve the educational situation of the country.”

In terms of internationalization, it proposes to: “compare national quality indicators with the international situation in order to evaluate progress.”

This section institutionalizes the neoliberal discourse for the decade of the plan, not only through education but also through dictating objectives that a *commission* is legally obliged to achieve, thus, affecting the resources (budget) of the country, norms, professions, relations, socio-cultural practices, etc.

6.6. Sixth Section - Monitoring and evaluation of the decennial national plan of education 2016-2026 / Discourse reinforced through evaluation

In order to evaluate the DNPE, besides the creation of the Management Commission mentioned previously, it was created a group to design a “battery of indicators” to measure the achievement of the goals proposed in the strategic challenges. This group was constituted by the “UNDP, National Department of Planning, ICETEX, Private Council of Competition, Entrepreneurs for Education and the Office for Consultation of Planning and Finances of the Ministry of National Education” (p. 67). These indicators are quantitative and mostly based on statistics. For example, to measure the change of paradigm they are going to track the results on the socio-emotional component on the SABER and PISA tests. For the education of educators, the battery proposes to follow the amount of pedagogy programs certified as high

quality, the level of training of the teachers, the percentage of human talent in early childhood education, teachers with postgraduate, among others. To regulate the scope of education, they plan to see the percentage of students in medium and high levels in the SABER and PISA tests, the coverage in education, the teacher/student ratio, among other percentages and rates. These are just a few examples, but the whole battery which is constituted by 83 indicators for the 10 strategic challenges, follows the same line. This is a clear representation of the strong emphasis on all possible ways of measuring achievements which is a legacy of the business systems based in efficiency and productivity.

This final section will have in the future the role of, through evaluation, reinforce or weaken the neoliberal discourse that, as we have seen throughout this chapter, was institutionalized in this education policy (DNPE), in its different sections, by the influence of a long contextual domination of multinational organisms over the Colombian Government, and through hidden mechanisms, statistics and the normativity of the Colombian law. Nonetheless, the “battery of indicators” suggests that the mainstream statistics, which are prompt to be used for generalizations about the effects of education, are going to be a crucial factor. Therefore, a huge responsibility falls to those people in charge of analyzing and sharing the data with the public, as well on the latter, because their criticality will be crucial when interpreting the results. On both groups depends the reinforcement or transformation of this discourse.

7. Conclusions

In this thesis I aimed to critically analyze the neoliberal discourse present in the policy document “Decennial National Plan of Education 2016-2026: the road to quality and equity” (DNPE). To do so, I used the main theories developed by Michel Foucault, Norman Fairclough and Teun Van Dijk, to understand the intricate relationship of how discourse shapes and is shaped by the social reality, where ideologies are developed, in order to make sense of that created world. From their theories, I also interpreted how discourse is a matter of struggle, which leads to power relations, inducing agents to spread their ideologies through institutionalizing their discourse in different ways, as acts of dominance or hegemony.

In order to do a Critical Discourse Analysis of the document, I tried to understand the context that led to its creation. That is the reason why in the third chapter I presented a contextual tracking of neoliberalism. First, I showed how it transformed from liberalism. Afterwards, I showed, briefly, how through the economic dominance of the USA and Europe, multinational organisms “recommended” economic and educational policies with neoliberal principles that got implemented in Latin America and Colombia. To see that situation in more depth, I focused the rest of that chapter to show international and national policies that in my opinion and, that of selected and mainly Colombian authors, were implemented in Colombia over the last 60 years, introducing explicitly and implicitly neoliberal values and practices to the education system and the society. From this period, it is important to highlight, the “German Pedagogical Mission” in 1968; the Decree 1002 of 1984, which established the curriculum for the levels of pre-primary, basic and vocational; the Law 24 of 1988 which restructured the Ministry of National Education decentralizing its responsibilities to regions and municipalities; the reform of the National Constitution in 1991 which declared education as a right and a public service; the Law 30 of 1992 which created the National Accreditation System and defined the funding for public universities; the Law 115 of 1994 which ordered the creation of the “Decennial National Plans of Education”; the document “Priorities and strategies for education” of 1995 from the World Bank, which recommended to allow the privatization of the school system and the funding of Basic education instead of higher levels; as well as the “National Development Plans” of 1991, 1995, 1999, 2007. Throughout this chapter, these aforementioned policies and several others, showed how step by step, in many cases responded to the economic context of the period, reforms were introduced that continued adding to the neoliber-

eral discourse, and promoting a neoliberal ideology which strengthened over the years in the country.

This chapter was a first methodological step to understand the context of the creation of the DNPE, and identify neoliberal values and practices, as well as the way they are normally expressed in the policies. Additionally, I referred to Foucault, Fairclough, Van Dijk, and other authors to understand different aspects to take into consideration for doing a critical analysis of the discourse, and I referred mostly to Van Dijk to find linguistic tools for analyzing the text.

While analyzing the DNPE, I found an important direct influence of multinational organisms. The UNDP appears as one of the entities that designed and wrote the final document. The OEA and ORCALC appear as organisms who orientated and validated its elaboration. Indicators given by the OECD are mentioned, as part for the analysis to determine the current state of the Colombian education. And the UNDP is part of the group that designed the “battery of indicators” to measure the achievement of the goals proposed in its Strategic Challenges. As well, references for the definition of education used for the document, there are quoted the “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” which Colombia signed in 1966, and the World Education Forum held on Dakar in 2000, which led Colombia to the agreement on the initiative Education For All. Additionally, the OECD, CEPAL, and UNESCO are referenced in the bibliography. All this participation, from the creation of the document until the evaluation of its results, shows that the influence of multinational organisms in Colombia has passed from mere “recommendations” to “hands-on” involvement in the creation of the policies. This reinforces the idea of Delgado (2017 p. 73) and Fernández and Ochoa (2014, p. 281), that Colombia has lost its autonomy in making its educational policies, to these organisms.

The document has a clear neoliberal lexicon. Quality is one of the most repeated words throughout the document, with the idea of development in different areas. Decentralization, efficiency, competition, internationalization, standardization, productivity, teachers training, evaluation, skills/competences and innovation are also some of the most repeated concepts on the document. Moreover, the Plan proposes to place the education sector in function of the economy, and presents education as something external to the human, which is for the sake of the regions’ or nation’ achievement, of some of the neoliberal concepts aforementioned, instead of, for the internal improvement of the self.

I also found that education, quality education, and human development are presented as the solution of several socioeconomic problems, for example: respond to regional labor needs, improve the quality of life and income, create equity and equality, generate social mobility, bring peace, create economic development, international competition, increase coverage and achieve sustainable development. This is reinforced in the Third Section where several statistics are presented in different areas to show the positive results that the system has shown in the last years until 2016. Additionally, different issues are not presented in that section, which makes seem this education system a perfect situation. Nonetheless, explicit equity (is part of the title of the document), and semi-implicit equality, are mentioned almost every time as desired outcomes of education. But inequality, one of the most visible problems of the system, is not addressed and it is barely mentioned, while it could be even being created by the own system. Presenting education as a universal solution for the socioeconomic problems hinders deeper analysis of the real causes and effects of the problems. Therefore, this kind of discourse should be more contextualized, and generalizations avoided.

Seen from a general perspective, throughout the sections of the document (from the Second Section on), the neoliberal discourse goes through an “institutional machinery” (Foucault, 1970, p. 56) that contributes to naturalizing it in the Colombian society. The Second Section shows, initially, how neoliberalism has been institutionalized by the influence of multinational organisms in the Colombian policies. Then, it shows how it happens in the society trough hidden mechanisms. As I mentioned above already, how those organisms have put “hands-on” in the creation of Colombian policy documents. The hidden mechanisms are more complex and subtle because they required a whole process of definition of priorities and concepts, exclusion, and specific methodologies and criteria for public participation in national surveys and forums, in order to introduce neoliberal values in the expectations of Colombians. The Third Section shows, how the neoliberal education system is grounded on positive statistics, as I have already explained. The Fifth Section is a feasible and materialized group of goals or “Strategic Challenges” which are meant to be achieved by a commission legally responsibly. Then those neoliberal values introduced in the previous sections, will transform into practice, soon after the Plan starts operating. Finally, the Sixth Section, might be a reinforcement to the whole discourse, trough evaluation indicators, if the results and their presentation are not critically done.

To conclude, it is interesting how the DNPE proposes to “promote an education that transforms the paradigm that has dominated education so far”, by generalizing and systematizing a

new paradigm based on innovation, while also striving for more evaluation and standardization, all around. Meanwhile, “alternative” systems, as those existent in the rich diversity of the Colombian culture, are marginalized as that: “alternative” systems that do not respond to the mainstream requirements of the competitive international markets for the sake of the multiple “developments”. It is here where this thesis gets a little value. When insisting, once again, that the neoliberal paradigm that has dominated education so far, is nothing more than a social construction imposed by the powerful hegemonies of a few countries and their multinational organisms.

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