

Education Review

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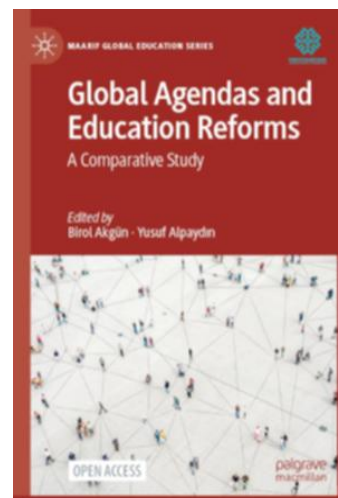
Akgün, B., & Alpaydın, Y. (Eds.). (2024). *Global agendas and education reforms: A comparative study*. Springer.¹ <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-3068-1>

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The book *Global Agendas and Education Reforms: A Comparative Study*, edited by **Birol Akgün** and **Yusuf Alpaydın**, is part of the *Maarif Global Education Series*. As explained by the editors, the concept of *Maarif* encompasses values such as self-knowledge, respect for oneself and others, enthusiasm for learning and teaching, and humility in the pursuit of truth. Consistent with these principles, the volume examines how global educational agendas are interpreted, negotiated, and implemented across diverse national contexts, offering comparative perspectives on the opportunities, challenges, and contradictions associated with contemporary education reforms. Publications in this series address education theory and philosophy from a global perspective, integrating both Eastern and Western perspectives. This book examines regional contexts, education policy, and national priorities through multiple lenses.



This work explores education issues across diverse national contexts, discusses theoretical insights, and presents empirical analysis about how local education systems of developing countries have prioritized, invested in, and adopted global policies to enhance the quality of their education system. It compiles 15 research articles from different contributors from 11 countries across four continents. The text is organized around four thematic issues, aligned with today's global agendas: 1) global educational reform agendas, 2) country-specific educational history and cases of educational reforms, 3) the emerging role of technology in education and national priority, and 4) the interface of globalization and local context and priority.

¹ This open access book is available free of charge: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-3068-1>

Drawing on secondary sources, the book addresses multidimensional issues of education in Africa, Asia, the Gulf States, Europe, and North America. It highlights the interconnections among global education agendas, local contexts, and national policies. Notably, the book does not include any of the South American countries. The overarching aim is to explore how global education agendas influence pressures to shape educational policy and priorities, and educational reforms in various national settings.

The book is organized into three parts; articles in each part explore how global education policies interact with national priorities. Comparative case studies of specific countries are presented, examining how they adopt or resist global educational reforms led by OECD, UNESCO, and the World Bank.

Global Dynamics Versus Local and Regional Realities

In the first part, the book discusses: 1) educational reform in Algeria; 2) linguistic diversity in the context of African Schools; 3) education reforms in Kazakhstan; 4) preparation for education in Emergencies in Pakistan; 5) complexities of higher education development in Slovakia; and 6) war, modernization, and systemic education reforms in the Ukraine. The articles in this section examine major global policy frameworks and initiatives, such as the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and OECD, that have influenced the educational reforms of the contemporary world. In the article, Educational Reform in Algeria, the Algerian reforms are critiqued for being influenced by globalization while overlooking local historical and cultural complexities (pp. 3–24). Lahmar frames this context as the dilemmas of Globalization, Equity, and Decolonization, and argues that such a global policy framework is option-driven by assumptions rooted in market-driven solutions (p. 18). This section provides a critical overview of the influence of international policies to shape national priorities, including employment, economic growth, equity, critical thinking, democratic citizenship, and more.

Context of 21st Century Skills and New Technologies

In the second part, the authors explore:

- 1) The future of education: AI-supported reforms in the USA and China.
- 2) Curriculum and pedagogic reforms of South Korea based on digitalization and innovation.
- 3) Malaysia's reforms of Islamic religious education through standardizing/ modernizing the curriculum and instruction.
- 4) Current transformations in Turkish education policies in the context of global agendas and increasing interaction in education.

This section focuses on digitalization and global education agendas, particularly AI and curriculum reforms. It examines the cases of implementation of global educational agendas, policies, and reforms in specific national contexts, presenting different stories regarding the implementation of global educational agendas in local contexts. For example,

in Turkey, neoliberal reforms driven by international financial institutions have encouraged both acceptance and resistance within the country. Other countries, such as Brazil, Kazakhstan, Slovakia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Albania, are also resisting global policies, standardization, as they advocate autonomy, free, and quality public education.

In China, the tension between global educational trends and local realities is evident. Adoption of global educational norms is inextricably tied to the country's political and economic modernization agenda, resulting in a paradox where international assessments like PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) play a significant role in shaping national educational strategies (p. 136). The chapter on South Korea highlights how digitalization and innovation have transformed pedagogy and curriculum (pp. 151–170).

In contrast, Brazil and Turkey face ongoing challenges in addressing socio-economic inequalities and uneven distribution of educational resources, a reflection of broader challenges, an issue common across the Global South.

Internationalization in Education

In its final part, the authors discuss internationalization in education through accreditation, mobility, and diversity. Topics include:

- 1) Gulf Countries' vision (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain) of internationalization of higher education.
- 2) Higher education quality assurance mechanisms for internationalization and sustainability) in Georgia.
- 3) Higher education and current educational reforms in Albania.
- 4) More internationalization, more innovation, the case of Canadian teacher training programs.

This section explores the interface between the local and global education agendas, highlighting how local stakeholders of education, like teachers, students, parents, and policymakers, adopt the global educational reforms in the name of standardization, internalization, and validation to fit the local cultural, economic, and political realities. A central theme in this section is the critique of the neoliberal model of education reform, which emphasizes market-based solutions, privatization, and standardized testing. Several chapters highlight how local resistance movements in countries such as Brazil, Kazakhstan, Slovakia, Ukraine, Georgia, Albania, and Turkey challenge these global reforms by advocating for more inclusive, equitable, and democratic educational practices (pp. 3-114). Similarly, in Finland, policymakers have largely rejected global educational pressures, prioritizing a national ethos of educational equality and teacher professionalism over international benchmarks and rankings (pp. 205- 207). This section underscores the importance of local agencies in shaping education policy and the potential for local actors to counterbalance the influence of global economic imperatives.

The book also provides insights for critical analysis of neoliberal policies like privatization, standardization, and commodification of education, and their negative impacts on the under-resourced countries of the least developed world. Furthermore, it summarizes the trends of digital education through AI applications instead of considering their impact on educational equity, teacher autonomy, and student engagement (pp. 135-150).

Such a comparative approach to the book is essential for understanding the diversity of educational responses to the same global pressures, making it an invaluable resource for scholars of comparative education. For instance, the chapters on the role of technology in education reform highlight not just the technological innovations but also the underlying socio-economic factors that drive technological investments in education (pp. 135- 195). This holistic approach helps bridge the gap between theory and practice. The book successfully contextualizes these transformations within broader global trends while offering practical insights for educators and policymakers directing these changes.

In addition, this volume explores how the local (country-specific) educational reforms emerged through their specific context and long struggle with their policy and programmatic intervention. It also discusses how global educational policies framed by OECD, World Bank, and UNESCO appear or penetrate the national education systems of these countries. Nevertheless, the different articles demonstrate the influence of global agendas on education, that different countries are trying to shape their education frameworks with their policy priority, and investment priorities differently, especially in the cases of Turkey, Brazil, Kazakhstan, Slovakia, Ukraine, Georgia, Albania, and China.

Thus, the book demonstrates that the policies and priorities of these countries are not influenced only by global agendas set by global leaders like the OECD, World Bank, and UNESCO, but that these 11 countries also have their own country-specific context and dynamism, including their own history, local sociopolitical contexts that have shaped their policy framework, and national priorities. Such country-specific dynamics have also mediated the bridge between local and global agendas.

Importantly, the book discusses the technical transformations in education and explores the growing role of technology in education, including AI, digital learning platforms, and online education. The contributors examine how countries are motivated to invest in and apply new technologies that involve teachers, students, and the entire education system.

Overall, this book advocates technological innovation to minimize the existing inequalities, particularly in developing countries, in underfunded circumstances in the education sector. Not only the developing countries, but also about how the superpowers of the world, like the USA and China, are applying technology for quality and efficiency in prioritizing (pp. 135-150). The book strongly shows that global trends exert a strong influence, and national education reforms are shaped by distinct socio-political histories,

economic priorities, and cultural contexts. Thus, the book is an important contribution to the field of comparative and international education.

Critical Reflections on *Global Agendas and Education Reforms*

This book explores the diverse realities, evolving agendas, and shifting priorities of various countries. It examines the dilemmas and contradictions in national responses, highlighting the tension between nationalist sentiment that resists global policy influence and the drive to internationalize education systems through the adoption of internationally accredited standards. The contributors focus on big issues like global educational reforms, national agendas, and priorities of many countries, but the importance of the perspectives or roles of teachers have been underestimated. Therefore, such an oversight limits the comprehensive analysis of how global policies affect classroom practices and teacher autonomy. Furthermore, the book also lacks the opinion or the experience of key stakeholders in education, such as students, parents, and policymakers. Incorporating such primary data from the immediate stakeholders would provide a more comprehensive picture of the impact of global policies on education.

The depth of analysis varies across chapters. Some do not engage with the critical historical, cultural, and socio-political influences that significantly shape the national context. Some case studies tend to generalize socio-political dynamics without fully engaging with the complexities of the country's unique challenges, such as regional disparities in educational quality and access.

Several chapters criticize neoliberal educational reforms, especially privatization, accountability measures, and market-driven approaches. While these critiques are valid and timely, the book could have benefited from a more balanced perspective, offering discussions on the potential positive outcomes of certain reforms. For instance, the chapter on China's education reforms focuses largely on the challenges and criticisms of the marketization of education, without fully exploring the potential for innovation within China's rapidly changing education sector.

The book offers an informative overview of educational data, applied policy, and programmatic interventions based on officially available sources from the eleven countries. However, it lacks in-depth analysis grounded in theoretical/philosophical linkages to specific national data. The following questions or issues noted in the next section should be considered in the next edition of the publication.

China's Investment in AI and Geopolitical Power Shift

While the book notes that China is investing in AI-supported education reform in the education sector more aggressively compared to the United States (pp. 135-150), it looks at the geopolitical implications. Given the world system theory of Wallerstein (2011, pp. 1-40), which assumes that such a power shift in technological innovation drives changes in the global power center. However, the book lacks such an analysis of the geopolitical implications of China's educational reforms focusing on AI.

Internationalization in the USA and Canada vs. Resistance in Other Countries

The book highlights “more internationalization, more innovation” (pp. 271-292) in the U.S. and Canada and other countries. On the other side, countries like Turkey, Brazil, Slovakia, Ukraine, Georgia, Albania, and Kazakhstan are searching for originality in their educational development and resisting the open entry of global education policies, especially the neoliberal project in their education system. Could such resistance be a historical reaction to the colonial impact? The book lacks discussion of such historical and post-colonial contexts that might explain such resistance. For example, the impact of the Macaulay Minute (1835) in South Asia, which was the intentional imposition/indoctrination of the English language and culture, continues to shape educational courses in the region.

Conceptualization of International Education

The book does not critically examine the concept of international education. Does it signify the adaptation of universal standards at the expense of local diversity and identity? Or does it represent a form of global scholarship or citizenship? The absence of a philosophical and ideological critique leaves readers without a clear understanding of the underlying values driving international education reforms.

Why are Arab nations, particularly Saudi Arabia, investing more than other Gulf countries in internationalizing their education (pp. 219-236) despite their very strict or closed cultural or religious identity? The book does not sufficiently address such paradoxes of a nation.

While the book acknowledges the influence of globalization and neoliberalism on various countries, the book does not discuss the implications of these two global forces. To what extent can these countries be isolated from the effects of today's globalization and neoliberalism? Given the challenges of the current neo-liberal international order, by challenging reactionary movements promoting national sovereignty (Hardt & Negri, 2019), a more detailed analysis of these political and ideological dimensions is necessary. Should countries align themselves with shifting global powers or pursue independent paths grounded in national sovereignty?

What is the meaning and framework of nationalist education, socialist education, people's education, and progressive education? Do these forms of education have alternative curricula, pedagogies, evaluations, and applications? The book lacks a comprehensive analysis of such educational concepts. Given that the modern education system is the British Education System, it is a factory-based model after the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840). The absence of a critical examination of curricula, pedagogies, and evaluations leaves a gap in understanding the potential of these educational forms.

The book collects the country-specific cases of resistance to global educational reforms but does not explore whether such resistance is based on

genuine alternatives or not. The book needs further philosophical and political analysis of such motivations and implications of such resistance.

The book discusses the Islamic education system of Malaysia, especially focusing on modernizing Islamic schools. However, the book failed to discuss the meaning of the Modernizing Islamic school (pp. 171-194) to the mainstream of Malaysia education system. Therefore, a more detailed analysis needs to explore the dynamics between traditional Islamic schools and modern schools in Malaysia.

These significant theoretical, philosophical, and political questions remain largely unanswered in this publication. The book is more focused on what is happening than on why it is happening. It effectively addresses the "what" questions but pays comparatively little attention to the "why" questions. As a result, a comprehensive theoretical or analytical framework for explaining the underlying causes and dynamics appears to be missing.

The book provides a comprehensive examination of how global education agendas are interpreted and implemented across different national contexts. It is well-researched, accessible, and offers valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and scholars interested in understanding the complexities of education reform in the context of globalization. As the global education agenda continues to evolve, this book will be an essential resource for those interested in the future of education worldwide.

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About the Reviewer

Raj Kumar Baral is a Nepalese scholar, author, and researcher specializing in curriculum studies, comparative education, and knowledge systems. He is the author of the *Shiksha Vimarsha (Education Discourse)* book series (Volumes I–III). He has authored and edited numerous publications on indigenous knowledge systems, subaltern studies, educational equity, and the educational experiences of Indigenous Peoples, Dalit communities, women, and children in Nepal. His scholarship also examines issues of conflict, peacebuilding, and social justice through critical and decolonial perspectives. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction



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About the Authors



Birol Akgün is a Professor and head of department of International Relations at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University from 2014 to the present. In 1993, he graduated from the Department of Public Administration at the Faculty of Political Sciences of Ankara University. In 1994, upon the assignment of the Ministry of National Education, he went to the United States on an official scholarship to pursue graduate studies, earning a master's degree (1996) and a PhD (2000) in Political Science from Case Western Reserve

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Yusuf Alpaydın completed his undergraduate education at Boğaziçi University in 2003, in the Guidance and Psychological Counseling Program, and his master's degree in the Adult Education program at the same university in 2006. He completed his PhD in 2013 at Istanbul University Labor Economics program with his thesis on the relations between the higher education system and the labor market in Turkey. Between 2003 and 2014, he worked as a school counselor in educational institutions affiliated with the Ministry of



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