

Global agendas and education reforms: A Comparative study

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ABSTRACT

Global Agendas and Education Reforms: A Comparative Study (2024) is a significant contribution to comparative and international education, examining how global policy imperatives—such as the SDGs, OECD frameworks, and digitalization—are localized within diverse national contexts. Edited by Birol Akgün and Yusuf Alpaydın, the volume traverses fifteen case studies across Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America, exploring tensions between globalization, decolonization, and equity in education. Through detailed empirical research—from Algeria’s postcolonial reforms and Africa’s multilingual schooling to South Korea’s digital leap and Canada’s teacher education internationalization—the book highlights the complexities of balancing global aspirations with local realities. Its methodological diversity, decolonial sensitivity, and open-access accessibility make it a valuable resource for policymakers, educators, and scholars. While uneven in analytical depth, it offers a rich, pluralist framework for understanding how education systems negotiate identity, innovation, and inclusivity in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: Globalization; Comparative Education; Educational Reform; Decolonization; Teacher Education; Internationalization.

INTRODUCTION

The edited volume *Global Agendas and Education Reforms: A Comparative Study*, edited by Birol Akgün and Yusuf Alpaydın (2024), stands as a timely and ambitious contribution to comparative education scholarship at a moment when globalization, digitalization, and postcolonial contestations are reshaping educational systems worldwide. As part of the Maarif Global Education Series, the volume undertakes a wide-ranging examination of educational reforms across diverse geopolitical contexts—from Algeria and Pakistan to South Korea and Canada—through the lens of global–local interdependence. The editors situate the book at the intersection of international policy diffusion and national educational sovereignty, inviting readers to interrogate how global agendas, such as the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the OECD’s Education 2030 Framework, are refracted through local histories, identities, and sociopolitical realities. In doing so, the collection raises profound questions about the balance between modernization and decolonization, between standardization and cultural relevance, and between global convergence and national differentiation.

From the outset, the editors acknowledge that education “reflects the evolving global landscape and the diverse needs of societies” (Preface, p. v). This assertion sets the stage for the book’s central argument: that global education reforms cannot be understood without grappling with the local political, cultural, and historical contexts that shape their enactment. Structured into three thematic sections—“Global Dynamics versus Local Realities,” “Curriculum and Teacher Training in the Context of 21st Century Skills,” and “Axes of Internationalization in

Education”—the book weaves together fifteen empirically grounded chapters that collectively explore how educational systems navigate the demands of globalization, digital transformation, and socio-political reconstruction. Each chapter contributes to a mosaic of reform experiences, illustrating how global policy frameworks are localized through negotiation, resistance, and adaptation.

A striking feature of the volume lies in its comparative and pluralistic approach. For instance, in Fella Lahmar’s opening chapter on Algeria, the author offers a meticulous account of how the postcolonial state grapples with “the dilemmas of globalization, equity, and decolonization” (p. 3). Lahmar traces the historical evolution of Algeria’s education system—from its socialist roots and Arabization policy to the current tensions surrounding multilingualism and neoliberal reform—showing how educational reform becomes a battleground for identity politics. The chapter’s empirical base, derived from the Decolonizing Education for Peace in Africa (DEPA) project, illuminates the complex intersections of curriculum overload, teacher preparedness, and parental perceptions. As Lahmar notes, “an intensive program with long study hours is exhausting for children, teachers, and the administration alike” (p. 10), an observation that resonates with Fullan’s (2011) critique of reform fatigue and the “wrong drivers” in system change, where accountability and curriculum expansion eclipse teacher capacity and student engagement. Lahmar’s qualitative methodology—rooted in interviews, NVivo coding, and self-reflexive translation—exemplifies the kind of grounded, participatory research that the editors champion as essential for decolonizing knowledge production.

The book’s second chapter, by Abdeljalil Akkari and Omar Thiam, continues this critical line by examining linguistic diversity in African schools and the persistent disjuncture between rhetoric and implementation. Their argument that “eight out of ten children in Africa begin their schooling in a language other than their mother tongue” (p. 25) underscores how inherited colonial language policies continue to marginalize indigenous knowledge systems. This chapter effectively links linguistic justice to the broader decolonial agenda in education, aligning with UNESCO’s (2023) Global Education Monitoring Report, which advocates for multilingual education as a foundation for inclusion and equity. Akkari and Thiam’s comparative perspective—drawing on examples from Niger, Mali, and Madagascar—exemplifies how localized policy innovations (e.g., bilingual schooling) can contest global hierarchies of linguistic capital. Their analysis moves beyond cultural relativism, arguing instead for epistemic plurality within universal learning frameworks—a balance that few global reform narratives achieve.

The central chapters of Part II shift focus to the technologization and future-readiness of education systems, exploring how digitalization, AI, and skills-based curricula are reshaping pedagogy and teacher training. Erhan Dönmez’s comparative study of the United States and China identifies the “AI-supported reforms” (p. 135) that are redefining the very concept of educational reform, moving it from policy-driven to data-driven governance. While the author is optimistic about artificial intelligence as a pedagogical enhancer, his analysis reveals underlying tensions around algorithmic bias, privacy, and pedagogical autonomy—concerns increasingly echoed in global education literature. Similarly, İrfan Ayhan’s chapter on South Korea provides an empirically rich account of how sustained public investment in “smart classrooms” and “digital innovation” (p. 154) has catalyzed educational transformation. Yet Ayhan’s narrative, while data-heavy, also hints at the socio-emotional costs of such acceleration—pressures that mirror those experienced in other high-performing Asian systems. By integrating policy analysis with socio-cultural interpretation, these chapters capture the paradox of digital modernity: innovation without adequate reflection on human-centered learning.

The Malaysian and Turkish cases in this section further deepen the discussion by juxtaposing religious and secular modernization within educational reform. The Malaysian chapter, by Asyraf Isyraqi bin Jamil and colleagues, maps the reformation of Islamic religious education and teacher training, tracing the shift from an “integrated to standard” curriculum (p. 171). The authors argue that aligning religious education with twenty-first-century competencies requires both curricular coherence and theological flexibility. Meanwhile, Ali Özdemir and Derya Karakurt’s analysis of Turkish education policies situates reform within the geopolitical realignment of Turkey’s global identity. By framing education as a site of “increasing interaction in education” (p. 195), the chapter implicitly critiques the uncritical borrowing of global models—a theme that resonates across the volume.

In Part III, the focus turns to internationalization and quality assurance. M. Hüseyin Mercan’s comparative analysis of Gulf countries exposes how regional visions of higher education internationalization are entangled with economic diversification and soft-power aspirations. Likewise, Pipia, Margishvili, and Parjanadze’s study of Georgia underscores the delicate balance between global accreditation standards and local sustainability goals. Their observation that “the interplay between internationalization, sustainability, and quality assurance mechanisms” (p. 237) can either democratize or stratify higher education echoes the findings of the OECD (2021), which warns that international mobility and accreditation regimes can reinforce inequality unless accompanied by inclusive governance. The closing chapter by Levent and Sağlam on Canadian teacher training programs—aptly titled “More Internationalization, More Innovation” (p. 271)—offers a hopeful conclusion. Their analysis positions internationalization as a form of pedagogical innovation rather than mere global branding, demonstrating how Canadian institutions integrate intercultural competence, reflexivity, and digital fluency into teacher preparation.

This exemplifies what the editors call a “symbiotic relationship between global perspective and innovative educational practice” (Preface, p. vii).

Methodologically, the book exhibits commendable heterogeneity. It combines comparative policy analysis, case studies, and qualitative inquiry, reflecting a plural epistemological stance. However, this methodological diversity also introduces certain limitations. The chapters vary widely in analytical depth, empirical rigor, and theoretical framing. While some contributions—such as Lahmar’s Algeria chapter and Akkari & Thiam’s linguistic analysis—offer dense qualitative evidence and conceptual sophistication, others remain descriptive, outlining reforms without sustained critical engagement. For instance, several chapters recount policy initiatives and investment figures (e.g., South Korea’s budgets or Kazakhstan’s enrolment rates) without interrogating the socio-political dynamics underpinning these reforms. This unevenness is perhaps inevitable in edited volumes of such scope, but it does affect the coherence of the overarching argument. The editors’ preface outlines a compelling vision of “aligning global aspirations with local realities” (p. v), yet the lack of a concluding integrative chapter leaves readers to draw the meta-theoretical connections themselves.

A notable strength of the book is its comparative geographical balance. By juxtaposing cases from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America, it transcends the Eurocentric bias that often characterizes global education reform studies. The inclusion of underrepresented contexts—such as Algeria, Georgia, and Albania—challenges the reader to reconsider what counts as “global” in global education discourse. The book’s decolonial undertone is especially significant: in documenting how nations such as Algeria and Malaysia negotiate global frameworks through their own epistemic traditions, it implicitly contests the unidirectional flow of educational ideas from the Global North to the Global South. This aligns with the UNESCO (2021) Futures of Education report’s call for “plural futures grounded in local knowledge and global solidarity.” The editors’ choice to publish under an open-access Creative Commons license further democratizes knowledge, allowing the book to serve as a pedagogical tool for policymakers, scholars, and students worldwide.

Yet, the volume is not without limitations. The absence of a unifying analytical framework means that “global agendas” are treated as a broad, sometimes amorphous category encompassing SDGs, digitalization, neoliberal policy diffusion, and internationalization. While this openness allows for interpretive flexibility, it risks diluting conceptual precision. Moreover, the term “reform” is often used descriptively, without distinguishing between reform as policy rhetoric and reform as structural transformation, a distinction emphasized in critical education policy literature. A more explicit theoretical integration—perhaps through frameworks such as world culture theory or policy enactment theory (Ball et al., 2012)—could have sharpened the comparative insights. Furthermore, the volume’s reliance on institutional and ministerial data, while informative, occasionally reproduces official narratives without sufficient critical distance.

Despite these caveats, *Global Agendas and Education Reforms* succeeds in illuminating the dialectics of globalization and localization. Its empirical chapters show that educational reform is rarely a linear process; rather, it is an ongoing negotiation among global norms, national politics, and local cultures. For example, Lahmar’s observation that Algerian parents view schooling as “like prison” (p. 17) because of curriculum overload underscores how macro-level reforms can alienate those they intend to empower. Similarly, the linguistic marginalization discussed by Akkari and Thiam demonstrates how global models of modernization can perpetuate epistemic inequities unless critically adapted. These insights reaffirm that educational reform must be understood as a social practice embedded within power relations, not merely as administrative change. The book’s emphasis on teacher training and curriculum coherence across contexts also resonates with Fullan’s (2011) argument that sustainable reform hinges on building professional capital and relational trust rather than imposing top-down mandates.

Reflectively, the book invites scholars and practitioners to rethink the epistemological assumptions underpinning global education policy. Its comparative scope makes it an invaluable resource for policymakers seeking to design context-sensitive reforms that are both globally informed and locally grounded. For teacher educators, the case studies from Malaysia, Turkey, and Canada offer practical insights into integrating global competencies without erasing local values. For researchers, the methodological pluralism exemplified by Lahmar’s DEPA project or the Georgian quality assurance study provides models for participatory and cross-cultural inquiry. Pedagogically, the book’s open-access format encourages its adoption in courses on comparative education, policy analysis, and educational leadership.

In conclusion, *Global Agendas and Education Reforms: A Comparative Study* is more than a compendium of case studies; it is a reflection on the moral and epistemic challenges of educating in a globalized world. It reveals that the pursuit of global quality, equity, and inclusion is inseparable from questions of identity, language, and power. While its analytical unevenness and absence of a synthesizing conclusion leave certain questions open, these very gaps invite further dialogue and research. The volume exemplifies the possibilities and paradoxes of comparative education in the twenty-first century—one that must navigate between universality and particularity, innovation and tradition, global vision and local voice. As the editors aptly note, the book “aims to contribute to

the ongoing dialogue on shaping education for a dynamic and interconnected world” (p. vii). In achieving this aim, it offers both a mirror and a map for educators and policymakers seeking to build education systems that are at once globally responsive and deeply human.

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