

**BOOK REVIEW**

# **MIGRATION, RELIGION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

**Mingbo Xu**♦

Ednan Aslan (Ed). *Migration, Religion and Early Childhood Education*. Vienna: Springer VS Wiesbaden, 2020. Pp. 261. ISBN: 978-3-658-29808-1.

**Abstract:** Undoubtedly, early childhood education empowers young migrant children to integrate culturally and linguistically into Europe. This also affords the migrant parents the opportunity, via their children, to interact with society more directly and ponder on their own (often quite antiquated) values through this interaction and possibly learn new mindset-changing lessons. The quality of young migrants' educational accomplishments, which have now been the centre of political discussions in European countries, should not be examined independently of the elementary education initiatives adopted by the European countries since they are strictly interrelated. The book, *Migration, Religion and Early Childhood Education*, calls on European educators involved in teaching migrant children to be more accommodating of their faith practices.

**Keywords:** Acculturation, Global Competency, Integration in Europe, Language Acquisition, Religious Education, Refugees.

*Migration, Religion and Early Childhood Education* is a collection of essays edited by Professor Ednan Aslan and first presented at the Conference held in Zagreb. The contributors of this book elaborate on the demands and challenges of the religious and cultural aspects

---

♦**Dr Mingbo Xu** is an associate professor at the College of Education Science, Hubei Normal University, China. His main research interests contain higher education management, ideological and political education and mental health education. Email: w13321219984@163.com

of Early Childhood Education. In the first essay, "Shared Reading for Valuing Diversity and Fostering Language Acquisition" (3-22), Johanna Choiring and Franziska Vogt argue that migrant children have fewer chances of successful careers. Traditionally, deficiency in skills in the common language is the leading cause of this inequality. Dialogic book reading helps enhance children's language skills. Teachers need to respect diversity while encouraging assimilation in acquiring local language skills.

Nausikaa Schirilla, in another thought-provoking paper, "Integration, Migration, and Islam as a Challenge for Early Childhood Education" (23-32), maintains that Islam is not often considered a religion in Western Europe, and Muslims face various stereotypes at many levels. The Western European governments focused on interreligious dialogue, tolerance, and stopping radicalisation. Academic staff working with children from Muslim families should be trained in a way that considers the Muslim faith normal. Muslim children's practices of the Islamic rituals are part and parcel of their life and worldview.

"The Role of Socialization Process and 'Cultural Concepts' in Cooperation with Parents of Migrant Backgrounds in Institutions of Early Childhood Education" by Leonie Herwartz-Emden asserts that children and adolescents experience socialisation processes when growing up provide a foundation for their future interaction in the host society (33-50). Educators with intercultural training in intercultural communication, in collaboration with the parents, can significantly help migrant children in their struggle for acculturation.

Sturla Sagberg's paper, "Attitudes Towards Religion in Kindergartens: an Ethical Discussion," examines the meaning of religious truth in an educational context, attitudes to religion in kindergartens, and the relationship between religious and cultural identity and contends that Norway has successfully introduced such laws and framework plans that have fought off possible indoctrination in kindergarten students (51-72). Education is a journey toward a pluralist and diverse society that is mutually respectful of each other's cultural and religious identities.

Pragmatic cooperation between religion-based pedagogy and secularist worldview helps reconciliation and integration.

Friedrich Schweitzer raises the dual question of how children perceive religious differences and how primary educational institutions are prepared to help children in this respect in the paper "Interreligious Education with Young Children: A Neglected Factor" (73-86). It is during early education that the saplings of acceptance and inclusion can be planted instead of the seeds of prejudice and mutual exclusion in the minds and hearts of children. Schweitzer recommends more training for KG teachers in European countries in inter-religious topics in view of migration.

Ednan Aslan, in "Early Childhood Education and Islam" (87-99), examines the challenge for Muslim societies to blend modern pedagogical insights into Quranic teachings. Aslan presents examples from Turkey, Palestine, and Austria to give the readers insight into educational concepts and theological positions. Policymakers and religious leaders should strive for the middle ground for modern pedagogy and traditional Islamic teachings in elementary school in both Islamic and European countries.

Bettina Brandstetter's paper, "Identity Negotiations in Early Childhood—the Kindergarten as a Central Place for Cultural and Religious Encounters," considers kindergarten as a social place where the young children experience cultural differences, religious plurality, and linguistical diversity (101-114). Her primary focus is on how the teachers impart education in a multicultural KG class with different languages and religious diversity and open up alternative spaces in which binary logics are overcome in favour of cultural or religious identity negotiations.

In the essay, "Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care: Why Worldview Sensitivity Matters" (115-135), Liam Gearon and Arniika Kuusisto provide context for the significance of worldview sensitivity in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Finland has been presented as a case study setting with *PISA Global Competence Framework*. There is a continued need for integrated thinking on intercultural understanding and worldview sensitivity across all educational phases, beginning with ECEC.

To explore the integration and segregation of Jewish and Muslim children in Israel, Yair Ziv, in "Segregated but equal? the Case of (Dis)integration in the Israeli Early Education System and its Effects on the Arab Minority Population in Israel," discusses the expected developmental outcomes for studying in a segregated system and in an integrated system. He concludes that the current Israeli education system does not afford equal opportunities for the Arab minority and argues for greater integration in the Israeli school system (137-151).

Ina Ter Avest, in her contribution, "Islamic Education in Belgium and the Netherlands: Challenging and Promising" (155-174), calls for a sustained dialogue between Islamic organisations and public educational institutions to find ways to give guidance to Muslim youth, exploring possibilities of a constructive integration of Islamic religious education with the needs of youngsters for the development of a flexible religious identity.

Based on ethnographic data gathered at the bilingual integrated Palestinian Jewish schools in Israel, Zvi Bekerman, in his paper, "Obstacles in Multicultural and Peace Education" (175-192), suggests the need for an "ontological, contextualised, and historicised approach" for peace and harmony among the communities from Jewish and Muslim heritage. While the children often reach beyond the boundaries of ethnicity and religion, adults struggle to negotiate their socio-historical positioning with their goals for peace.

The Editor, Ednan Aslan, in his second contribution, "Religious and Ethical Orientations of Muslim Refugees" (193-202), presents the results of a study of the religious and ethical ideas of Muslim refugees in the city of Graz and the initiatives taken by the Austrian government for the integration of refugees coming from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. The integration of these refugees into the Austrian education system and the labour market is only possible if the government works on the capacity building of these migrants. The Muslim scholars could help significantly to dismantle the mental ills such as antisemitism and misogyny from the minds of Muslim migrants.

Juan Ramón Ferreiro Galguera, in his essay, “Recent Immigrations in Spain and a Brief Approach to Unaccompanied Foreign Minors” (203-224), examines the immigration in Spain with statistical data, relevant legislations, and the government policies. The author insists on the fundamental right to education for unaccompanied minors and offers creative suggestions for the future of refugees in Spain and Europe.

“Frameworks of Otherness: The Challenges of Integrating Immigrant Children in Greek Cypriot Public Schools” by Spyros Spyrou discusses the challenges of effective and sensitive handling of immigrant student diversity and the means of integrating them (225-237). The author argues that despite an overall European orientation, the Greek Cypriot educational framework has a strongly nationalistic discursive framework that shapes children’s worldviews toward others early on.

In the final essay in this collection, “The Problems of Syrian Students Concerning the Adaptation Process to Schools in Turkey: A Qualitative Meta-Synthesis” (239-261), Mualla Yildiz uses 80 academic studies and a meta-synthesis of 24 studies. The problems were classified into eight groups: language barrier, registration and equivalency problem, lack of educational materials and programs, social adaptation, academic failure, absenteeism, health problems, and the attitudes of the Syrian parents. After examining the proposed solutions, the study discussed whether the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge course would contribute to solving the problems.

The work, with its lucid presentation, clear structuring, and coherent discussions, breaks significant ground in its approach to the sensitive topic of migration, religion, and early childhood education. The book would have been more robust if it had given more space to host communities’ genuine concerns and difficulties while hosting migrants from Muslim countries with hostile attitudes and religious prejudices towards European civilisation and culture. This excellent book is worthy of recommendation to students and researchers of immigration, integration, culture, religion, sociology, and early childhood education in a multicultural society.