Teaching Peace and Conflict: The Multiple Roles of School Textbooks in Peacebuilding

Catherine VANNER, Spogmai AKSEER, Thursica KOVINTHAN LEVI (eds.)
Cham, Springer, 2022, 205 pages, ISBN:9783031046759 (Hardback)

Beyza Gülin GÜNEY
Ph.D., Independent Researcher
E-Mail: beyzagulinguney@outlook.com
Orcid: 0000-0002-1773-8445

While education can play an important role in fighting inequalities, it also perpetuates them, and this perpetuation feeds into social division and conflict (Dikkaya and Özyakışır 2006, 163–65). Textual analyses across 71 countries from 1966 to 2008 found that textbooks were influenced by armed conflict (p. vii). The importance of this collection, *Teaching Peace and Conflict: The Multiple Roles of School Textbooks in Peacebuilding,* is that it illustrates the crucial position not just of political parties, elections, and security, but also of education within conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

This edited book highlights the role of textbooks as hegemonic tools. The political impact is very evident in history, civics, and social studies textbooks. This study reveals that textbooks represent a dominant status quo, exacerbate divisions and tensions between groups, while also creating spaces and challenging existing conflict dynamics. This emphasizes the importance of demonstrating the multiple, intersecting roles that textbooks play simultaneously. It further contributes to our understanding of state-focused educational activities in the post-conflict era. While this study is a compilation written by education researchers, it is also valuable for informing researchers working in peace and conflict, a subfield of international relations. The book consists of 11 chapters, including an introduction, three main parts, and a conclusion.

In the introduction (Chapter 1) Levi addresses the focus of the collection, the role of textbooks in conflict studies and peace education. She critically examines how the self and others are represented in textbooks, highlighting the experiences of certain groups while ignoring those of others, and the impact of these choices on peace (Cash 2022, 131–135).

This collection focuses on elementary, middle, and high school textbooks. Each chapter examines the case within a framework based on the textbooks' roles as "accomplice, victim, and transformer." The first part of this three-part collection is based on the theme "democratic

values and processes." In the first chapter of Part I (Chapter 2), Dunlop examines social studies textbooks after the Burundian civil war. Her analysis showed that the textbooks' focus on interpersonal conflict is not oriented toward social reconciliation as stated in the peace agreement, and does not promote social change (Edwards 2024, 60–61).

In Chapter 3, Kalhoro and Cromwell analyzed the education policy documents of Pakistani governments prior to and during the Musharraf regime. This study found the impact of interest groups in the formulation of education policies and in hampering the process of educational reforms. In Chapter 4, Levi analyzed how group identities were depicted in civics textbooks for grades 6-9 in Sri Lanka after the three-decade conflict with the Tamil Tigers. The findings revealed that the textbooks highlighted citizenship based on ethnic identity, limited the integration of elements within national identity, and therefore did not demonstrate the goals of fostering cohesion as stated in the policy document, but instead failed to provide students with a qualified education on the challenges faced before, during, and after the conflict.

The second part of the collection deals with the themes of "equality and inequality." In the first chapter of Part II (Chapter 5), Nazari carried out a content analysis of secondary school textbooks in Afghanistan. The findings showed that new topics were included in the textbooks because of the influence of external actors; hence, there was contradiction in the textbooks regarding democracy, new social values, and gender equality. They fostered moderate ideas while simultaneously embracing radical ones. In Chapter 6, Akseer conducted a content analysis of primary school textbooks in Afghanistan. The analysis revealed that political regimes and international powers politicized and militarized textbooks. In Chapter 7, Shahzadeh conducted a content analysis of 9th and 10th-grade civic education textbooks to understand gender roles in Jordan. It indicated that male and Muslim representatives of Jordanian identity were exemplified while the contributions of other non-Muslim and non-Arab groups, as well as women, were not mentioned.

The third part of the collection is based on the theme "historical narratives and competing truths." The first chapter of Part III (Chapter 8) is based on Skårås's ethnographic research conducted in second and third grades of secondary school in South Sudan. The research concluded that in local communities where textbooks are absent and family elders are the primary narrators, one-way narratives within the classroom strengthen national identities. However, tribal conflicts learned outside the classroom prevent students from transforming their perceptions of themselves and other groups, contributing to the perpetuation of conflicts.

In Chapter 9, Vanner, Levi, and Akseer conducted a thematic analysis of Social Studies, English, and Christian religion textbooks taught to fourth-grade students in South Sudan. It was determined that these do not provide an education that fosters critical and inquisitive thinking about the causes of inequality, injustice, civil war, and conflict. In Chapter 10, Halilovic-Pastuovic carried out a content analysis of secondary school textbooks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, following the Dayton Peace Accords, finding that they were ethnicized.

Finally, in the concluding chapter (Chapter 11), Akseer, Vanner, and Levi present the overall assessment of the findings by the chapter authors. This assessment pointed out the politicization of school textbooks analyzed across three continents, their aspects of divergence, overlap, and contradictions. The authors also underline the ongoing effects of conflict, which were obvious in every chapter. Across the case study analysis, the following themes were identified: "ethnicized learning, obedient citizenship, and past as a challenge and an opportunity for change." It was found that the predominant role for textbooks was that of "an accomplice." The prejudiced narratives in textbooks have been strengthened by government officials while civil society and international actors have promoted themes of diversity and multiculturalism. On the other hand, a lack of technical and material resources, teachers' reservations as well as societal and political reactions continue to impede interrogation of the curriculum.

The strong point of this compilation is the comparative study based on a number of case studies. Each chapter employs different methods such as document analysis, interviews, and ethnographic research. These research methods enrich the book and guide researchers. Moreover, cautionary remarks regarding fieldwork ethics in conflict zones are especially valuable. Also, maps, tables, and photographs used in the compilation not only help raise the level of comprehension when reading but also facilitate the visualization of the study cases. Although the introduction provided readers with a conceptual framework of the study, the repetition of literature on the roles of the accomplice, victim, and transformative roles of education in each chapter disrupted the flow. In addition, while authors who conduct interviews include the perspectives of students, teachers and curriculum developers, the addition of textbook authors would have contributed to the analysis (Ifadloh et al. 2022, 2).

The editors stated that the collection's focus is on conflict-affected Global South countries and that the Western and Global North countries could be examined within the same framework as well. Textbooks from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and South Sudan are examined at different educational levels. However, assessing examples from different countries rather than from the same country would enhance the study. One must acknowledge that including these examples would make the collection overly extensive. Yet, it would be useful to understand whether Global North countries engaged in peacebuilding were also successful in implementing their education policy goals, and compare those examples with the ones from the Global South countries. With both strengths and weaknesses, this study is important not only for gaining insight into education but also for providing new insights into peace and conflict studies research. It is also worth reading because it has generated local, national, and international results that guide policy makers.

References

Cash, J. 2022. Anxiety, Ambivalence and Sublimation: Ontological In/security and The World Risk Society. *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 19, 73: 129–145.

Dikkaya, M. and D. Özyakışır. 2006. Globalization and Information Society: The Globalization of Education and the Effects of Neo-Liberal Policies. *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 3, 9: 151–172.

Edwards, J. 2024. Winning the Peace: The Role of International Peace Settlements in the Creation of World Orders – A Geopolitical Marxist Perspective. *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 21, 82: 59–77.

Ifadloh, N., J. R. Pratama Rusman, and F. Yonata. 2022. 'Teaching Peace and Conflict: The Multiple Roles of School Textbooks in Peacebuilding. *Journal of Peace Education* 20, 1: 1–3.

AI Disclosure Statement

I hereby declare that I have used ChatGPT's Scholar GPT features solely for language support in providing accurate expression and meaning for the sentences used in the text, and Grammarly solely as an aid for punctuation, word choice and grammar correction. I acknowledge and affirm that all original ideas, interpretations, and academic content in the work are entirely my own.