

**Book review**

**Adult language education and migration: Challenging agendas in policy and practice**

Simpson, J. & Whiteside, A. (Eds.), 2024. Routledge, London and New York. 291 pp., ISBN 9780415733601

Reviewed by Kenneth Charles Lambo  
Charleton University

---

Given the recent world events of unprecedented proportions (e.g., COVID-19, wars, and populism), the movement of people across borders looks like a scene in an apocalyptic movie. Whether migration is fueled by choice or by force, it is the numbers that tell the truth. According to the UN's World Migration Report (2022), an estimated 281 million people live in a country other than their country of birth, which is 128 million higher than in 1990. Much research is done on its impact on children, yet scarce literature is dedicated to adults, especially on the policies that influence their education in a foreign country. To address this disparity, the editors of "Adult language education and migration: Challenging agendas in policy and practice" touch a sensitive topic of migration with a critical examination of policy maneuvering on the opportunities for adult language learning in nine focal countries

(i.e., Australia, Canada, Spain (Catalonia), Finland, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, the UK, and the US). They gather 25 contributors to analyze and, in the process question, the language education policies of these countries, bringing us a comparative study of their policy and practice. This comprehensive analysis is a significant contribution to the field, shedding light on wide-ranging issues of integration, top-down policy, language and citizenship testing, monolingual hegemony, multiculturalism, plurilingual classroom practices, and teaching challenges.

Though my lifetime dwarfs that of the combined years of experience of the authors, I strive to be objective and critical. My reviewer positionality is that as a developing researcher interested in the interplay between education policy and adult education, this is the area that both shapes my ontological belief and lived experience of being a product of immigration myself. I am also a Canadian adult language educator involved in the immigrant community of learners, so this is a turf I can speak with confidence. The book starts with an Introduction from the editors. They acknowledge the uneven and contradictory relationship of policy and education (i.e., practice). Chapter 1 traces Australia's history in migration and language policy from two opposing poles—one that seeks to preserve the dominance of English and the other is embracing a proactive and inclusive culture—while Chapter 2 discusses four transformative approaches in ESL teaching that help learners develop skills relevant to their local communities. Chapters 3 and 4 investigate Canada's language policy and its province's (Quebec) effort to preserve its French heritage. Chapter 5 appraises the Catalonian government to push Catalan as a language for Catalonian unity. Chapter 6 proves that ignoring a monolingualist ideology secures teachers and learners in a freer expression of identity in classrooms and the Catalonian community.

On the Nordic region, Chapter 7 describes Finland's language policy as problem-centred in the discourse of migration, and in contrast, stay-at-home mothers' language education in Chapter 8 sees that being a mother inspires them to learn the language of the new country for public access on resources and social life. Going to France, Chapter 9 supports the French for Integration framework that interprets multiculturalism differently from Canada. Chapter 10 contrasts the position in the previous chapter in a way that learners must be encouraged to utilize their full linguistic repertoires to learn French. Chapter 11 balances the

precarious relationship between British English (colonial language) and Irish (historical status) in Ireland, whereas Chapter 12 describes the politicization of immigration in times of good economy and the failure to support once immigrants arrived. In northwest Europe, Chapter 13 describes the anti-immigration turn of the Netherlands' political life. Chapter 14 reports that ICT-based apps for language and literacy development for new arrivals have their pros and cons. Chapter 15 examines the UK's underfunded language policy and policies historically rooted in protecting the border from outsiders. Chapter 16 looks at a London-based action research initiative inspired by the works of Paulo Freire called *Whose Integration?* Chapter 17 explores the US language policy that sets the literacy and English proficiency standards for migration, obtaining a Green Card, and becoming a US citizen despite the country's no official language. Chapter 18 relates to community-based literacy programs in New York to support the educational needs of adult immigrants in the US who are developing literacy skills in both their native language and English. The last section of the book is the Afterword by Martin-Jones.

From the Introduction to Afterword, this 18-chapter comprehensive compilation of the state-of-the-art knowledge-sharing on some of the world's best and brightest truly revolutionizes the policy and practice of adult migrants' education worldwide. One of the notable strengths of this book is its bold attempt to show the reality of migrant adult education in liberal welfare states. They are bold, I argue, because they point out inequalities in a time when right-wing politics (Chapter 13), budget cuts (Chapters 12 and 18) and strong calls for heritage language preservation (Chapters 4 and 5) could potentially change research and policyscapes. They expose the "language planning agents, levels, and processes" like "unpeeling the onion" of the layers of language policy (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996, pp. 401-402). In addition, they provide innovative teaching practices: content-based teaching (Chapter 2), ESL educators as social justice enforcers (Chapter 4), translanguaging (Chapter 6), plurilingual competence in the classroom (Chapter 10), and community-based programs (Chapters 12, 16, and 18). These emerging pedagogical toolkits are unique to the "divergent geographical, historical and ideological factors" (p. 7) of the country. The teaching practices illuminate accounts of actions taken by countries to defy their "monolingual disposition" (Piccardo, 2013, p. 610), favouring a more

neo-liberal provision and support for migrant learners.

A striking criticism on this book is its lack of a unified definition of “immigrants”. It may be true that it is a common word but think of it like the word “terrorist”—to some, they are extremists, and to others, freedom fighters (e.g., Ganor, 2010). *Immigrant* is operationalized and treated differently in many countries as permanent residents, “migrant, foreign born, and international migrant” (Bolter, 2019, p. 1), and some would go as far as those who are asylum seekers, refugees, and undocumented. Each use of the term corresponds to specific immigration policies and to some extent limits access to government funded language programs such as the case of the *inmigrantes indocumentados* or undocumented in the US (see Chapter 17). Such a lack of definition hardens the distinction between the “winners and losers” of “governmental decision-making” (Zahariadis, 2016, p. 2), and therefore the cycle of policies would not have a long-term effect.

Another observation to highlight is the choice of exemplary countries. Historically, these countries have welcomed immigrants; however, it seems Eurocentric to only focus on the Global North, given that migration is a globally occurring social phenomenon. There are countries outside of those mentioned in the book that experience human mobility. Many international migrants live in Asia and Europe, each accounting for 31%, followed by North America with 21%, Africa hosts 9% of migrants, Latin America and the Caribbean account for 5%, and Oceania for 3% (United Nations-International Migration, n.d.). Including other non-OECD member states in the book would have comprehensively described worldwide migration and education.

Regarding the general argument and content of the book, the contributors of the volume pitch their years of expertise to bring to life a new wave of wisdom, sparking a discussion not just within the academic circle but also on the political side. The book juxtaposes policy and practice in each focal country, which exemplifies what the government chooses to do or not to do (Dye, 1972). This tells me that they are reaching out to the audience to think about the ideologies and agendas surrounding the policies and to take stock of what equitable language education means to them. In particular, the book ties up the role of politics in language education. I have seen this eminently in Chapters 3-4, 7-8, and 17-18. The interrelationship of education and policy could

not be underestimated, more so now that the line between the two has become blurry, contentious, and filled with ideological forces at play. For instance, in Chapter 11, the tension between British English and Irish goes far beyond and is muddied with violence and dark colonial history, so it is only fitting for policymakers to tread their policies to balance the significance of both languages. This situation in Ireland is not an isolated problem. As this book implies, a deficit perspective remains a firm grip in policymaking. By deficit, policies are meant to solve the *problem*—which is, in this case, the immigrants. It happens in the US and Canada, too, as their chapters explain, and to which Douglas Fleming of Chapter 4 succinctly sums up: “To deny learners opportunities to explore meaningful and active civic engagement on the basis of their English language proficiency is to do great disservice not only to them, but also to Canada” (p. 78). This connects not only in Canada but also to the country where language education is implemented.

From diverse intellectuals united with a common goal, this oxytocin-infused book is packed with transformative ideas, discussion starters, and inspiration for a social justice movement. It resonates mainly with an audience composed of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers devoted to studying language education in migration contexts. The academic tone and research-backed chapters call the readers to reconsider their assumptions and take an epistemological turn on how adult education should be approached from the social justice perspective. While the book concludes that there is a mismatch between practice and localized interpretation of policy, one good thing emerges: the innovative spirit of people to stick to democracy and a just society in a complicated world. And this book is all about that.

## References

- Bolter, J. (2019). *Explainer: Who is an immigrant?* Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Explainer-WhoIsAnImmigrant-PRINT-Final.pdf>
- Dye, T. (1976). *Policy analysis: What governments do, why they do it, and what difference it makes*. University of Alabama Press.
- Ganor, B. (2002). Defining terrorism: Is one man's terrorist another man's freedom fighter? *Police Practice and Research*, 3(4), 287–304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1561426022000032060>
- Piccardo, E. (2013). Plurilingualism and curriculum design: Toward a synergic vision. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(3), 600–614.
- Ricento, T. K., & Hornberger, N. H. (1996). Unpeeling the onion: Language planning and policy and the ELT professional. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(3), 401–427. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587691>
- Simpson, J., & Whiteside, A. (Eds.). (2024). *Adult language education and migration: Challenging agendas in policy and practice*. Routledge.
- United Nations. (2022). World migration report 2022. Retrieved from <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022>
- United Nations. (n. d.). International migration. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/migration>
- Zahariadis, N. (2016). Setting the agenda on agenda setting: Definitions, concepts, and controversies. In Zahariadis, N. (Ed.), *Handbook of public policy agenda setting*, (pp. 1-22). Edward Elgar.