



Book review

Actors, Spaces, and the Politics of Knowledge in Education Governance? A Review of *The Rise of Knowledge Brokers in Global Education Governance*

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Who holds the authority to define knowledge in global education? This question lies at the heart of *The Rise of Knowledge Brokers in Global Education Governance*, edited by Chanwoong Baek and Gita Steiner-Khamsi. The book goes beyond explaining how education policies are shaped and instead reveals who produces and mediates the knowledge that is later labeled as evidence for decision-making. In the context of global education governance, knowledge is no longer treated as a neutral outcome of research but as a political commodity that circulates through networks of power and international institutions.

The book traces how knowledge brokers have become key figures in mediating the relationship between research and policy. These brokers not only translate research findings into the language of policy but also shape the meaning and trajectory of that knowledge. When organizations such as the OECD, UNESCO, and the World Bank disseminate international assessments such as PISA or other global indicators, they are not simply collecting data; they are defining the conceptual boundaries of



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what counts as legitimate learning outcomes. Global education policy therefore becomes an arena where the production and use of knowledge are interwoven with asymmetrical power relations.

In a sharp and critical introduction, Gita Steiner-Khamsi dismantles the illusion of neutrality that is often attached to evidence-based policy. She demonstrates that the term evidence-based frequently functions as a new form of legitimacy for global interventions, especially those driven by donors and international consultants. The concept of *knowledge brokering* is then used to unpack this dynamic in greater depth. Brokers are not passive intermediaries who merely transfer ideas from researchers to policymakers; they are political agents who determine how knowledge circulates, who has access to it, and which truths are legitimized. Their position grants them control over meaning, authority, and validation within the global education policy arena.

In the subsequent chapter, Chanwoong Baek introduces the concept of *epistemic translation* to describe how global ideas are adapted within local contexts. He explains that each time a global policy is translated into national practice, a complex process of negotiation and meaning-making takes place. In this process, brokers act as epistemic negotiators who balance global pressures with local needs. They do not simply translate terms but modify the underlying normative orientations embedded in the policy. Baek's analysis reveals that policy translation is not a linguistic event but a form of representational politics that defines whose interests and voices are prioritized within educational systems.

In Chapter Three, Ward and Mouthaan shift the focus to the OECD as a policy learning space that appears collaborative yet is deeply hierarchical. Using a sociological approach, they show that the OECD functions as both a producer and a guardian of global epistemic standards. Programs such as PISA and TALIS not only generate data but also establish norms regarding how educational success should be measured. In other words, the OECD operates as a space that appears horizontal but is structured by vertical logics that reinforce the dominance of certain forms of knowledge over others.

Wind and López, in Chapter Six, turn attention to middle- and low-income countries. They introduce the idea of hybrid policy spaces, which are arenas where global ideas intersect with local practices to create new forms of governance. Within these spaces, local brokers operate as epistemic assemblers who combine donor logics, government aspirations, and social realities. This chapter is particularly important as it demonstrates that the role of brokers cannot be detached from the material, political, and historical conditions in which they operate.

The concluding chapter by Baek and Steiner-Khamsi offers a powerful normative reflection on epistemic justice. They argue that debates about knowledge brokering must move beyond questions

of efficiency in knowledge transfer to address a deeper issue: who is recognized as a legitimate producer of knowledge. In a global landscape still dominated by Western epistemologies, they call for knowledge equity, which they define as the fair distribution of rights to produce and validate knowledge. This concept places the politics of knowledge at the center of social justice and education policy.

Compared with *The Role of Knowledge Brokers in Education* by Joel Malin and Chris Brown (2019), which focuses on the research–practice relationship at the national level, Baek and Steiner-Khamsi expand the discussion to the global scale. They analyze not only the functional link between research and policy but also the structural conditions that enable epistemic dominance. Similarly, when placed alongside *The World Yearbook of Education 2023* (Scott & Bajaj, 2023), the book adds a critical dimension by examining how racialization and coloniality shape hierarchies of knowledge in international education.

The strength of this volume lies in its analytical consistency across three interrelated axes: actors, spaces, and the politics of knowledge. These dimensions form a conceptual framework that explains how knowledge is produced, mediated, and legitimized. Actors function as meaning-makers, spaces provide the social infrastructure through which knowledge circulates, and the politics of knowledge defines who holds the authority to determine what counts as truth. Together, these components offer a coherent interpretive lens through which transformations in global education governance can be understood.

The book's relevance becomes even clearer when examined within the contexts of Northern Europe and Southeast Asia. Nordic countries such as Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark have long been viewed as models of educational equity and trust in the teaching profession (Sahlberg, 2021). However, recent studies show that globalization and neoliberalism have begun to shift these value orientations. Telhaug et al. (2006) observed that the Nordic model, once a hallmark of egalitarianism, has gradually adapted to global competition. Samuelsson and Lindblad (2015) found that Finland continues to uphold professional autonomy, while Sweden has moved toward a more market-oriented education system. In this changing landscape, knowledge brokers play an increasingly vital role. They are not only mediators between governments and international organizations but also protectors of local pedagogical values that face global pressure.

Lundahl et al. (2018) highlight the tension between social justice and marketization in Nordic education, arguing that global metrics such as PISA drive homogenization at the expense of local diversity. Kallo and Välimaa (2025) further note that Nordic universities now face mounting global

and digital pressures that require new foresight capacities to anticipate uncertainty. Clarke and Vertelytė (2023) expose how epistemic injustice persists in Nordic education through the invisibility of race and ethnicity within curricula and policy. Taken together, these analyses reveal a paradox: while the Nordic region remains a beacon of equity, it is increasingly constrained by global standardization. In this context, Baek and Steiner-Khamisi's call for knowledge equity gains renewed urgency.

A similar, though differently manifested, dynamic can be observed in Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) reform illustrates how global ideas are localized through active epistemic translation. Fitrah et al. (2024; 2025) demonstrate that Indonesian education policy embodies a dynamic process in which teachers and pre-service educators act as local knowledge brokers. They reinterpret global notions such as deep learning, 21st-century competencies, and technology-enhanced learning within the social and cultural realities of their schools.

Fitrah et al. (2024) found that demographic factors, including employment status and teaching experience, significantly influence teachers' use of digital technology in mathematics classrooms. This finding highlights the importance of institutional and policy support for equitable digital knowledge brokering. Meanwhile, Fitrah et al. (2025) showed that teachers' readiness for deep learning pedagogy depends more on reflective and critical competencies than on technological mastery alone. These findings illustrate that Indonesian education reforms are not simple adoptions of global ideas, but complex negotiations mediated through social practices.

Other contemporary studies reinforce Baek and Steiner-Khamisi's arguments. Golhasany and Harvey (2025) argue that institutional recognition and supervisory support are critical for successful knowledge mobilization. Pino-Yancovic et al. (2025) show that professional networks can mobilize knowledge effectively when local agency is respected. Richards et al. (2025) find that public participation enhances the legitimacy of knowledge governance, while Viseu et al. (2025) demonstrate how philanthropic actors use brokering to create new digital policy spaces within public education systems, reshaping the topology of governance toward educational technology. Gebremariam (2025) and Cummings et al. (2025) emphasize that epistemic decolonization is a prerequisite for achieving genuine knowledge justice.

Through these examples, Baek and Steiner-Khamisi's book reveals that knowledge brokering is a universal phenomenon with diverse local manifestations. In the Nordic context, it represents a negotiation between teacher professionalism and data-driven accountability. In Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, it reflects the balancing act between global policies and local realities. Across

both settings, knowledge functions as a dynamic political field in which ideas are constantly contested and redefined.

Synthesizing these insights, the book can be understood as proposing a framework for global knowledge governance as an epistemic assemblage. Within this framework, actors operate as epistemic assemblers who negotiate authority and values; spaces, whether institutional, networked, or public, serve as infrastructures of circulation that shape capacity and direction; and the politics of knowledge regulate legitimacy and justice through negotiation rather than comparison. This model aligns closely with the LINC framework (Learn, Illuminate, Nucleate, Communicate) proposed by Dragnić-Cindrić and Fusco (2025), which connects the book's conceptual ambition with practical pathways for transformative governance.

Ultimately, *The Rise of Knowledge Brokers in Global Education Governance* is not only an academic contribution but also an ethical call. It reminds readers that knowledge is never value-free because it is always entangled with power, identity, and social justice. In a world increasingly governed by data and algorithms, the message of this book is profoundly relevant. Epistemic justice is a prerequisite for sustainable and inclusive global education.

This book is highly recommended for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners who seek to understand the politics of knowledge in education. With its depth of analysis, breadth of references, and mature cross-contextual reflection, this volume enriches comparative and international education theory while expanding the ethical horizon of who has the right to define and mediate knowledge in the educational world.

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