

Preface

The 23rd BCES Annual International Conference: *Education at a Crossroads*

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The 23rd BCES Annual International Conference, hosted by Yeditepe University in Istanbul in September 2025, brought together scholars, practitioners, and policymakers from across the globe under the theme *Education at a Crossroads*. This pivotal gathering fostered critical dialogues on the pressing challenges and transformative opportunities facing education in the 21st century.

The overall aim of the Annual International Conference of the Bulgarian Comparative Education Society (BCES) is to be a premier global forum for scholars, researchers, educators, and policymakers to engage in critical discussions on various topical problems of education in national, international, and comparative perspectives. Serving as a vital hub for education specialists, the BCES Conference promotes a culture of open dialogue, collaborative efforts, and idea sharing and provides a unique opportunity for individuals from diverse backgrounds and perspectives to come together, share their insights, and collectively address the challenges and opportunities facing education today. (BCES Conference website>About us >Aim and Scope, para 1)

This volume captures the rich diversity of perspectives, research findings, and innovative solutions shared during the 23rd BCES Conference in 2025, reflecting the multifaceted nature of education at this decisive moment.

The volume features 33 papers authored by 56 scholars representing various regions across the world, from East Asia and South Africa to the Americas and Northern Europe. Their collective work enriches the global dialogue on education, offering versatile insights and innovative solutions to the challenges explored in this conference.

Methodologically, the papers are equally diverse. Alongside empirical studies presenting robust research findings, this volume includes theoretical and conceptual frameworks that challenge conventional paradigms, critical analyses of education policy decisions shaping national and global systems, and reflective personal views on

contemporary educational challenges. This methodological plurality mirrors the complexity of education at a crossroads, offering both evidence-driven solutions and provocative intellectual discourse.

Organized into six thematic parts, representing the BCES Conference thematic sections, this volume focuses on key dimensions of today's educational discourse:

- Part 1 “Comparative and International Education” examines the role of comparative studies in addressing global challenges, with insights into school counselors' autonomy, vocational education trajectories, and the relationship between physical resources and school effectiveness.
- Part 2 “International Education Issues” explores the crossroads phenomenon itself, analyzing leadership competencies, policy in learner safety, and the imperative of nurturing 21st-century student identities.
- Part 3 “Preschool and School Education: Policies & Practices” highlights critical issues in early childhood, primary, and secondary education, ranging from teacher recruitment crises and risk management in technology workshops to principal competencies and the impact of constructivist learning environments.
- Part 4 “Higher Education & Teacher Education and Training” addresses evolving demands on universities and educators, including emotional intelligence in learning and the integration of refugee youth into higher education systems.
- Part 5 “Law and Education” investigates the intersection of policy, equity, and economic growth in shaping educational systems.
- Part 6 “Wellbeing in the School Ecosystem” underscores the importance of counseling and mental health in building resilient educational communities.

As editors, we extend our deepest gratitude to the authors for their rigorous scholarship and to the conference participants for their vibrant exchanges. The theme *Education at a Crossroads* has proven exceptionally topical and fruitful, inspiring meaningful discussions, groundbreaking research, and actionable decisions.

We hope this volume will catalyze further inquiry and innovation, guiding educators and leaders as they navigate the complexities of education with wisdom, equity, and a commitment to sustainable progress.

Nikolay Popov, Editor-in-Chief, on behalf of the BCES Editorial Board