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Theoretical basis of comparative education and suggestion of a model: comparative education council in Turkish education system

Sadullah Dede^a, Gülsün Atanur Baskan^{b*}

^aPhD Student, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education, Hacettepe University, Beytepe/Ankara, 06800, Turkey

Abstract

This study considers the theoretical basis of comparative education. The results presented here were obtained through literature review. This study first considers what comparative education is, and provides information about the field of comparative education. It then examines the historical and hypothetical development of comparative education in the world and provides brief information of the comparative education studies in Turkey. It also, by providing details on some important centers operating in this field, proposes the establishment of a similar committee or centre in Turkey as well.

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1. Introduction

It is known that there is a variety of internal and external factors that determine and shape the character and content of a country's education system. A country's geographic, ethnic and religious structure; its system of governance; and its educational, economic, demographical, political and cultural parameters all have an effect on the shape and direction of an education system. This situation has formed a basis for many debates in this field for more than half a century, contributing to the development of new approaches in education administration.

A country's education system cannot be described as being in a coincidental relationship with its own society. All education systems adopt the characteristics of the society in which they exist and reflect that society's values. By having a strong command of these characteristics, we can find clues that help us to evaluate correctly the truths behind the success of effective processes in an education system, in fields from administration to inspection, and from planning to economics. At this point, comparative education comes out as a key concept in the field of education to understand all these issues. The results presented here on comparative education were obtained through the review of literature.

* Sadullah Dede. Tel.: +90-312-297-8550; fax: +90-312-299-2027.

E-mail address: sadullahdede@hotmail.com.

2. Comparative education

There are many definitions for comparative education, and further contributions are still being made. As a field that is still developing, this situation is undeniable. When we look at existing definitions, the following can be said: comparative education is a field that attempts to establish the world's education problems and, by considering the similarities and differences between these problems, examine them in the context of a country's values and conditions so as to develop proposed solutions that are unique to the country.

While comparative education is useful to policymakers and decision makers in the education system to help them better understand both yesterday and today, it also shines a light on the systems' future and, by developing healthier projections, contributes to stronger decisions being taken. For this reason, the findings and results of comparative education studies are valuable resources for the administration of education systems.

With a multidisciplinary approach and a critical view of the world's developed and developing regions and countries, comparative education attempts to determine education's role in individual and societal development and examine its many perspectives and societal foundations. Comparative education studies, with the aid of certain statistical data, help countries examine their own education systems closely and through a wider lens, from both an intercultural and international perspective. In parallel to a culture of easier access and faster distribution of information, comparative education is an increasingly important resource for those administrators, planners, economists and other policymakers who give direction to an education system to make the right decisions.

Broadly, comparative education is a field that was developed through examining education systems in other countries (Kelly, Altbach and Arnove, 1982). In examining such systems in developed and developing countries, it benefits from the outputs of such disciplines as sociology, psychology and anthropology. The majority of comparative studies are focused on researching the role of education in individual and national development. These studies simultaneously allow us to question our own education systems and provoke us into looking at how our societal values affect our attitude about how we intend to educate (Kubow and Fossum, 2007).

In the near-50 year period following the Second World War, comparative education rapidly moved towards becoming a science. Its field of study was initially limited to comparing the education systems of different countries, but today it is much more connected to education and shown a trend towards examining the various issues that shape education systems. This trend has directed scholars of comparative education to compare the global and local factors that affect education in different parts of the world.

The educational problems encountered by different communities in the present day on the whole exhibit great similarities with the problems faced by other communities. For this reason, scholars of comparative education have focused on examining the common ground between the problems that occur in different socio-cultural, political, economical and geographical conditions. This situation helps educators, who have attained a global perspective through comparative education, to produce global solutions unique to a problem of regional scope.

In this increasingly globalizing world, it is inevitable that an educational system will produce common ground with the rest of the world, or those particular methods will be shared by all. This situation requires that the decision-making person possesses both global and local perspectives for a reasonable management. Put another way, from the point of view of those educators in a clear position to learn new things from other nations and cultures, comparative education has acquired a new dimension as an inseparable part of the teaching profession and is developing in this direction.

3. The objectives of comparative education

Comparative education scholars, who examine local and global examples and conduct comparative analyses of these, assist those working in this field to see the similarities and differences in the implementation of education subjects in different societal conditions, to understand the different factors that affect education in different conditions, and to contribute to their career development (Kubow and Fossum, 2007). In this sense, one of fundamental objectives of comparative education is to broaden the perspectives of the individuals working in this field, and of those benefiting from them.

George Bereday (1964) thought comparative education had an intellectual purpose, in his opinion the objective of the comparative education was to search for lessons that can be learned from the various educational practices in different societies.

Furthermore, educators in different countries are examining educative matters from different perspectives, which leads to an additional objective for comparative education: to understand these perspectives in light of the cultural, social and political conditions unique to a country. Individuals who understand this point of view would not find it difficult to appreciate why the direct imposition of one country's strategy upon another would not be as effective.

Kandel (1933) saw internationalism as the main contribution of comparative education: According to him, comparative education was a way to appreciate and understand the other countries and one's own as well, and this could lead to the development of internationalism. For Nicholas Hans (1967), the objective of comparative education was to find solutions to national problems. According to Epstein (1983), comparative education is not merely an academic work but also a subject that has practical use within education reform. For this reason, one of the objectives of comparative education is to understand and increase the awareness of the theoretical and philosophical presumptions that lie beneath educational problems and educational reforms in different countries. By this method, it becomes possible to understand why the same application produces different results in different conditions and how effective societal values are upon education.

Comparative education provides opportunities to discover foreign cultures and their educative values, and simultaneously creates a capacity to evaluate our own culture and educative values (Kubow and Fossum, 2007).

Comparative education assists particularly in rescuing students from their own local and limited perspectives, introducing them to foreign systems and, provided the societal values and underlying philosophical thinking is explicit, helping to demolish prejudices. With the provision to increase awareness of different systems, comparative education also helps decide which factors should be taken into account when developing educative applications, and which factors are the most important (Epstein, 1983).

4. The hypothetical development and theoretical basis for comparative education

According to Noah and Eckstein (1998), there are three main stages of comparative education. The first stage was composed of the anecdotes of travelers who travelled to different parts of the world and recorded the educational practices and habits in those places. These notes were mainly the reflections of the observations of those people whose first aim was not the observation and determination of educational implementations. The second stage was a period of conscious educational borrowing and adaptation in the 19th century (Gutek, 1993; Noah and Eckstein, 1998). In this period educators travelled to many places to observe the educational practices and school systems and in this way they tried to determine the useful ideas to be adapted to their own countries. They especially observed the educational systems, their structure and organizations and the educational methods of those countries (Kubow and Fossum, 2007). The works of the visitors, mainly educators and politicians, were prescriptive and uncritical and based on personal judgment. The third stage in comparative education was developed in the 20th century through international cooperation. According to Arnove and Torres (1999), in this stage, comparative education contributed to the international peace and understanding and it was necessary for world harmony and the improvement of the quality of the lives of people (Kubow and Fossum, 2007). Educators of the 19th and 20th centuries mainly focused on comparison of education systems in different countries to find a way to improve or reform the education systems in their own country. They also tried to find out the rationales of the differences among different education systems. They believed that learning about other countries and their systems was necessary to determine and understand the underlying factors of problems at home and for the resolution as well.

It is generally accepted that the method and principles of comparative education began their development through the work of Marc Antoine Jullien. The method of a systematic structure for collecting data, categorizing it under determined criteria and comparatively analyzing it was first developed by Jullien. Jullien's objective was to compare and contrast the information collected from different countries through a series of analytical tables. These tables would produce certain principles and thus allow education to develop as a "positive science".

At the beginning of the 20th century, Michael Sadler said that in evaluating an education system one must surely consider the values, realities and conditions of the society in which that system developed. It was in this way that the existence and need to examine economic, political, cultural and societal factors affecting education was demonstrated for the first time, and a fresh point of view was brought to comparative education.

In particularly the first, and later the second half of the 20th century, it can be seen from a cursory look at scientists involved in comparative education that a majority were migrants or asylum seekers with personal experience of education in several different communities. This process, which began in particular with Nicholas

Hans and Isaac Kandel and developed with Harold Noah and Max Eckstein, saw opinions of greater scientific judgment emerge, thanks to the personal experiences and scientific identities of these individuals. Nicholas Hans wrote one of the first textbooks on comparative education and emphasized the importance of understanding such factors as religion, language, geography and economy, which affect every country's education system in a different way. Kandel underlined the importance of understanding the conditions of education systems in different communities, particularly the effect of different political systems on educational development (Hayhoe and Mundy, 2008). Kandel also touched on a phrase that sustains its importance today: the importance of education in achieving world peace. It was Kandel who first said that elements within nationalist ideology that could be considered bad and become a cause for war in the world could be dispelled through education, thus attaining international peace.

Following the World War II, comparative education developed rapidly both as a field of study and a field of application. Education associations comparing not just national, but regional and global systems started to be formed in the 1950s and became active in international work. This allowed the global perspective of education to gain importance and for international education issues to be considered. From 1945 until 1970, comparative education was focused almost exclusively on the relationship between education and national development. The availability of more reliable and comprehensive educational statistics, and the ability to conduct wide-scale quantitative analyses using computers were the reasons why great pains were taken to transform comparative education into a wholly "scientific" form. This positivistic step was the cause for some impassioned debate over the objectives and method of the field (Hayhoe and Mundy, 2008).

With his 1964 book *Comparative Method in Education*, Bereday demonstrated a systematic approach to collecting data belonging to different education systems, presenting them side-by-side within tables and diagrammatic presentations and, as a result, through inductive logic, defining the principles of education laws and societal development.

In 1969, two scientists who emigrated from Britain to the United States, Harold Noah and Max Eckstein, suggested in their book *Towards a Science of Comparative Education* an approach that used education data gathered from many different countries in order to find the causality relationship between the desired educational results and the educational and societal inputs that would achieve them. They said that for these broad-scale studies, the more countries' data is used, the more "scientifically" reliable the findings would be. This way, through use of computers, there emerged a belief that it could be possible to quantify the relationship between education and societal development.

It was at this time that comparative educationalists began to consider some of the important questions that have been posed from the 1960s until the present day. One of these investigates the relationship between education and economic development and questions which form of investment in human capital brings greater social rates of return (thus benefitting the economy) or individual rates of return (thus supplementing an individual). Another question that began to interest educationalists further was which factors in school and in society delivered educational achievement.

Beginning in the 1960s, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) began a series of studies in order to find answers to these questions. As the years progressed, an increasing number of countries were incorporated into the studies and alternative international achievement studies, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), were developed.

One of those individuals who have made an important contribution to the development of comparative education as a science is Brian Holmes. He believed that culture was the predominant factor affecting educational development, and devised a methodology that he considered scientific in a post-positivist sense and attached great importance to religious and cultural values that are not of a measurable type.

By the middle of the 1970s, it became clear that the majority of comparative education findings had limited relevance to developing third-world countries. Despite becoming politically independent, these countries had educational systems that were suppressed with the ideals and effects of the former colonial power. The dependency theory or the world systems theory, both of which find their roots in neo-Marxist teachings, contributed to determining the obstacles to independent and cultural authentic educational development within the world capitalist system.

Martin Carnoy introduced a new point of view to comparative education circles with his 1974 book *Education as Cultural Imperialism*. Carnoy believed that events in schools in Africa, India and East Asia were neither decided upon by the educators of those countries, nor were they not unique to them. In contrast, he argued that the language,

curriculum models and school organizational approach of the former colonial power had shaped these countries' approach. In this regard, their education policies were being shaped in accordance with continuing development aid, a process Carnoy described as neo-imperialism.

The theory of dependency is a form of neo-Marxism, developed by Latin American economists to explain the underdevelopment or irregular development of countries in that region. According to the theory, the role of these countries in the world economic system – controlled by leading countries in Europe and North America – was inevitably one of dependence; their education system was as a normal and unavoidable part of this process. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who objected to this situation, is one of the first individuals in his field to draw attention to education imperialism and object to it. The spread of the Freire pedagogy allowed for an increased exchange in educative ideas between South and North, and contributed to comparative education.

The supporters of this approach included some scholars such as Robert F. Arnove, Philip Altbach, Gail P. Kelly and Nelly P. Stromquist. Robert F. Arnove attempted to establish a link between comparative education and the world systems theory. This theory is a different form of neo-Marxism based on an historical analysis of the development of the capitalist world order. In essence, it argues that the world's underdeveloped regions are shaped according to economic movements and capital flow. Among those scholars, Kelly was one of the leading feminist figures in comparative education and was one of the early women pioneers of the field.

The entry of post-modernism and post-colonial theories into the field of comparative education has to a large extent shaped the field's manner of engagement with the concept of globalization. These theories object to the presumption that globalization is essentially an economic process and, in its place, argue that globalization must in fact be understood as a cultural process. Within this process, the western modernism, science and rationalization is accepted as playing a powerful role in the acquiescence of other peoples and cultures.

When the literature is reviewed in relation to the theories affecting the studies in comparative education field, it is observed that two main theories are dominating the field: the modernist theories of the early scholars and the postmodernist and poststructuralist theories.

In views of Kubow and Fossum (2007), modernist theories were affected by Enlightenment rationalism. Predictability and logical sequencing of events were the main characteristics of those theories and they viewed human conditions as manageable and perfectible. Two major theories of modernist theories in this field were structural functionalism and Marxism.

Structural-functionalism considers the society is a system of interrelated parts such as political structure, education, religion and family. These parts try to achieve a balance or harmony among themselves and the balance among the parts can be achieved as a result of consensus. Any conflict emerged among the parts creates social tension and it is thought to be dysfunctional to social integration and balance. Gradual and incremental changes rather than rapid and major societal changes are preferred in structural-functionalism Kubow and Fossum (2007).

Modernization theory and human capital theory are the reflections of structural-functionalism in terms of national development. For the development of a nation, modernization theory proposes education make a contribution to the economic development and promote the integration of student with the existing economic system. For such integration, work-related attitudes, values, behaviors and beliefs are considered necessary. Human capital theory mainly focuses on the productive nature of human and sees the training of the productive capacity of human as a capital investment. With an assumption that economic returns of education increases depending on the amount of education; for the development of a nation, human capital theory proposes education make a contribution to the economic development through increasing the productive capacity of human beings.

Marxism considers the society as a combination of two polarized classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; in other words, the exploiter and the exploited. As a result of such an economic structure, the relationship between the exploiter and the exploited is the main factor of societal change. Social change is usually resulted from the great conflicts in the society and if the awareness of the exploited rises, this arrives to revolution and major changes in the society (Kubow and Fossum (2007).

Dependency theory and liberation theory are the reflections of Marxism in terms of national development. Dependency theory considers there is a direct link between the development of rich countries and underdevelopment of poor countries and accordingly, it sees developed countries dominate the less developed or poor nations. For the development of a nation, dependency theory proposes education reinforce the dependent condition of the less developed societies or of the poor in a nation. Liberation theory considers literacy is necessary for economic development and focuses on the development in terms of justice rather than in terms of wealth. For the development

of a nation, liberation theory proposes education to be used to help the oppressed of a society become aware of their condition to force a social change.

Postmodernist and poststructuralist theories deny rationalist explanations and they mainly focus on marginalized alternative perspectives. Postmodernist and poststructuralist theories have brought new concepts into the agenda of education, including feminist theories, ecological theories and some important issues such as gender, race, intercultural education and identity and consequently expanded the work field of comparative educators.

5. Comparative education in Turkey

Comparative education studies at academic level in Turkey started with the first lecture of Professor Lauwerys in 1969 at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Ankara University. The lecture notes of Lauwerys were combined and printed by Professor Fatma Varış in 1971. This is the first book published on comparative education field in Turkey. After 1970s “Comparative Education Research Institute” was founded by Professor Kemal Aytaç at Ankara University. Aytaç’s works are considered as the first original works in the field in Turkey. The first PhD dissertation in the field called “Comparison of High School Programs in Turkey and France” was written by Adil Türkoğlu in 1977.

The book called “Contemporary Education” written by J. F. Cramer and G. S. Browne in 1965 was translated into Turkish by Ferhan Oğuzkan in 1982 and this was an important contribution to the field. After 1980s, comparative education studies increased at universities. One of the first examples of comparative education studies published in Turkey was Adil Türkoğlu’s book in 1985, which reviews the education systems in France, Switzerland and Romania.

Today, there are various works of comparative education studies in Turkey, which are published either as books or articles in journals. Although there are various kinds of individual works in the field, there is not an institutionalized capacity in Turkey for comparative education studies.

6. Comparative education associations and centers in the world

It cannot be rationally acceptable that comparative education is only studied at a Master’s degree or Doctorate level at universities, and not utilized or executed for practical purposes for the public’s benefit. It is known that comparative education is occasionally used in different process within the administration of education systems, which are wide open to internal and external pressures.

From the end of the 19th Century, education associations and centers were opened in certain countries. Their objection was to examine the education systems, models and methods of organization in other countries. These associations were more than individual efforts towards comparative education; they also indicated the beginnings of institutionalization in this field.

Organizations such as the Office of Education in the United States, the Institut Pédagogique National in France, the Pestalozzianum in Switzerland, the Office of Special Inquiries and Reports in Britain and Germany’s Zentralinstitut für Erziehung und Unterricht gathered scientists from different fields and, with a multidisciplinary approach, analyzed the world’s education systems and the factors that kept these systems afloat. They examined the results and developed them for further benefit. When we consider the common features of these organizations, it is striking that their principal task was to gather education statistics and keep them on record. Aside from this, each organization hosted a comprehensive library containing thousands of volumes, issued periodicals and published essays in the field of comparative education. There were also consultation centers for educational research and international education studies, exhibition areas, and units producing analysis documents and reports.

These centers examined the education systems of different countries, their conditions, their manner of organization and structure, and the tools and methods they used. They also gathered statistics relating to those countries and archived relevant documents. One of the important tasks of these centers was to organize international conferences and seminars. There were also diverse ranges of material open for researcher use.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

Considering the global educational developments and the benefit of the above-mentioned comparative education centers to their respective countries and education systems, it is considered that a similar institute, department or committee/council would be beneficial to conduct education work under the aegis of the Ministry of National Education, which gives direction to Turkey's education system.

Such an organization can conduct researches on the theory, method, principles and practices in comparative education both at home and abroad and then share its outcome reports with all stakeholders of the education system and the public, adopt recommendations and organize activities that raise awareness, and can thus make a functional contribution to the operation of the Turkish National Education system and the work of the Board of Education and Discipline.

Consequently, through a scientific viewpoint, contributions can be made to the development and implementation of National Education Policies which are in accordance with the country's realities and consistent with the expectations and objectives of the information society of the future.

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