

What can be gained by engaging in comparative education studies



It is in the very nature of logical activity to make comparisons. Comparing is a elementary part of thought process which enables us to make sense of the world and our experience of it. Indeed, it can be said that only by making comparisons can we properly defend our position on most questions of importance which requires the making of the judgments.

Comparing causes us to make statements to the effect that one thing is intellectually or morally preferable to or more effective or better than the other, and this can be clearly exposed in the education field, where the quest for improvement for doing things better is always compelling.

In a world which is mainly focused on intense global economic competition and growing beliefs in the key role of education as the source of potential advantage, governments have become increasingly obsessed with the international rankings of measured educational outcomes. Educational policy is increasingly driven by national attempts to copy the perceived advantage associated with the educational strategies and techniques of other countries.

Margret Brown argues that documenting practices in high-scoring countries that give ideas for change are very important (as cited in Broadfoot 2000, p. 361). It would be at least as important to find out why similar projects have not been successful in other countries. (Shorrocks-Taylor & Jenkins 2000, p. 16)

It is crucial to assess any suggested practices from one country to another. Teachers and the general public need to be informed about the problems of putting something “ borrowed” into practice and reform ideas from other countries to our own system.

<https://assignbuster.com/what-can-be-gained-by-engaging-in-comparative-education-studies/>

The increasing international importance of a policy discourse of learning in relation to conventional educational institutions such as schools and universities, reflects the contemporary understanding of the implication of the 'knowledge society' (Broadfoot 2000, p. 358); It is of great potential and inevitability for the whole population to be capable and disposed to take advantage of the new methods for accessing new knowledge that information and communications technology is making available. This also reflects the growing recognition that 'learning' is not equivalent with teaching. Today's growing concern is lifelong learning which is powerfully described in a recent European Commission report: 'The Treasure Within'. (Broadfoot 2000, p. 358)

Different perspective of comparative education by different scholars

Antoine Jullien de Paris in 1817 saw comparative education as an analytical study of education in all countries with a view to perfect national schooling systems with adaptation and changes from which policymakers can borrow ideas to implement in their own-country (Bray 2007, p. 1).

In Hans' view the utility of comparative education was that type of education which analyzes comparative law, comparative literature or comparative anatomy in order to highlights the differences in the forces and origins that create the differences in the educational systems (C. S. Oni 2005, p. 244).

Lewis approached the issue of comparative education in terms of an Island formation. Lewis asserted that, no country is an island; that each is a part of the world; therefore, no educational system anywhere in the world is worth

anything unless it is comparable to some other systems in the world.”(Quoted from C. S. Oni 2005, p. 244).

Comparative education for Blishen is the branch of educational theory that has to do with analyzing and interpreting the educational practices and policies in different countries and culture (C. S. Oni 2005, p. 244).

Le Thanh Khoi believed that comparative education is a multidisciplinary area when he said that it “ is not strictly a discipline, but a field of study covering all the disciplines which serve to understand and explain education” (quoted from Bray 2007, p. 35).

In addition to learning about other people and cultures, comparative education also helps the researcher to know about oneself. As George Bereday puts it:

“ It is self-knowledge born of the awareness of others that is the finest lesson comparative education can afford.”(Quoted from Kubow & Fossum 2003, p. 11).

With the enhancement of nationalism and the increasing importance of the nation states in the beginning of the 19th century comparative education was pushed ahead. The objective was to learn useful lessons from foreign countries, especially concerning education systems. This contained a very colonialist view of the western societies on the foreign countries. School systems were seen as a resource of new educational ideas, which could be “ borrowed” to improve the own school system. Comparative education transferred itself from highly pure description level to a more sophisticated

analysis. With the rise of the social sciences in the 1950s the historical aspect became insignificant. Instead comparative education was introduced as a true science by using statistical techniques and more quantitative methods. The main approach was structural functionalism.

The aims of comparative education:

The aims of comparative education are to describe educational systems, processes, and ending products as well as to assist in the development of educational institutions and practices. It also highlights the relationships between education and society and establishes generalized statements about education that is valid in more than one country. Comparative education also deepens our understanding of our education and society; it can be of great aid to policy makers and administrators; and can be of great asset in the education of teachers (Bray 2007, p. 15). Comparative research also helps us understand better our own past; locate ourselves more exactly in the present; and see more clearly what our educational future may be. Comparative education gives the researcher the ability to describe what might be the consequence of certain courses of political and economical action, by looking at experience in a range of countries. From the theories mentioned above extracted from different scholars, we can see that comparative education facilitates the researchers to learn from the accomplishment and faults that other countries have made in the process of solving similar educational problems. The focal point of comparative study in education is the collection and categorization of information, both descriptive and quantitative.

As Sadler stated in one of his lectures delivered in 1900:

<https://assignbuster.com/what-can-be-gained-by-engaging-in-comparative-education-studies/>

In studying foreign systems of education we should not forget that the things outside the schools matter even more than the things inside the school, and govern and interpret the things inside. We cannot wander at pleasure among the education systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and picking flowers from one bush and some leaves from another, and then expect that if we stick what we have gathered into the soil at home, we shall have a living plant. A national education system of education is a living thing, the outcome of forgotten struggles and “ of battles long ago”. It has in it some of the secret workings of national life.” (Quoted from Philips in Alexander et. al 1999, p. 19).

On Comparing

The comparative education researcher should go far from the familiar to see the unfamiliar ‘ to make the familiar strange’, in order to broaden the principles, geographical and epistemological view (Broadfoot 2000, p. 363).

When comparing in education researchers are producing a variety of descriptive and explanatory data which differ from micro to macro comparative data analysis, allowing us to see various practices and procedures in a very wide context that helps us to throw light upon them (Sultana as cited in Borg 2009, p. 21).

While less developed countries have a tendency to look at more developed countries to learn from them, more developed countries tend to look at countries that are on the same economic and educational level to make cross-national comparisons. Examples of this are number of countries that looked at USA as their model. Switzerland in mid-1990 apart from looking up

to USA, it also hired American consultants to develop a reform package for schools (Steiner- Khamsi 2002, p. 76 as cited in Bray 2007, p. 18). On the other hand, America learned also from other countries (Levin 2010, p. 96 in [www. kappanmagazine. org](http://www.kappanmagazine.org)) like East Asia, (Bray 2007, p. 21-22) where the US department of education made an intensive study of Japanese education and came out with 12 principles of good practices. Educators and policy makers went to Finland, which is the top-performing country in the first three rounds of PISA, in order to find the key to education success to achieve high marks in PISA. Private companies like Cisco and McKinsey, are issuing reports on the quality of education around the world.

Comparisons across time provide information about improvement or decline over the years like comparing the different periods in the history of education. These comparisons though are limited in the nature of the reference groups or criteria used: that is they are usually limited to school systems similar to those being evaluated. When policy makers look at the past to learn for the future as the British policy makers used to do in 1980's to make comparisons with their own past rather than with other countries. Sometimes the reason to compare with the predecessors is to see how the society has developed as well as to learn from the mistakes that were done in the past (Bray 2007, p. 23, Bradburn & Gilford 1990, p. 2).

Comparisons with other localities or between states, provincials and regions compare similar local educational systems within the same state, or with those in other states or the nation as a whole. Comparisons with other states or the nation as a whole have the advantage of comparing between educational systems that are broadly similar. They provide information on <https://assignbuster.com/what-can-be-gained-by-engaging-in-comparative-education-studies/>

particular nation's level of achievement in education to the much broader area of the world's education system (Bradburn & Gilford 1990, p. 2).

Example of such comparison is the comparison between the education systems of Hong Kong (Bray 2007, p. 131) or the education systems of Macao (Bray 2007, p. 134). When comparing the researcher has to identify the areas; countries or places, and cannot be generalised. As Le Than Khoi (in Sultana as cited in Borg 2009, p. 16) gave the example of the Mediterranean. There are too many differences in the region that we call the Mediterranean" to make it the object of comparative analyses. Culture is an important factor when comparing places. An example of this is the result that Finland got in the PISA in 2002 compared to other places which was based on the reading competences. Finland achieved well as it has centuries of cultural tradition that long promoted the reading ability (Bray 2007, p. 167).

A comparative education researcher must try not to be prejudiced either on political, national, religious, racial, gender or ideological aspects. It is crucial that the paradigms used are relevant to all geographic areas and nations that are included in the study. Differences between inter and intra-national research present challenges in comparative research that must be recognized. Such differences are often significant resource of cultural variation (Bradburn & Gilford (1990), p. 21).

The contribution of developing countries in international studies adds information to the development of local research capacity and also widens the sample of participating countries. Third-world participation develops

North - South dialogues as well as East- West linkages as it serves as a good source for building trust and co-operation (Bradburn & Gilford (1990), p. 22).

As the economic sector is increasing its value and the importance of having a sound education system, the business and industry sector may consult comparative educational studies in their international planning. Textbook publishers, developers of educational software and other educational traders use comparative education to categorize the needs and markets for new products. So the question raised is " In whose interests do the education system and decisions taken, work?" (My lecture notes).

Though comparisons in education are of great benefit there are also who is sceptic and critic about it. There is the belief amongst these that comparative research will lead to a homogeneous-world approach to education that impede proper attention to each country's unique history, culture, and people.(Bray 2007, p. 178). This idea comes from experiences with international institutions that forced economic policies that had negative consequences in less-developed countries. It is vital for policy makers to keep in mind that not all the methods of any country can or should be put into practice in other countries. (Lavin 2010, p. 96 in www.kappanmagazine.org, Stromquist 2002, p. 87)

It is important that " insiders" and " outsiders" work collaboratively in order to research and development work that is more sensitive to local, social constructions of reality. (Crossley 2002, p. 82)

Education research projects and organizations:

As global economic competition increases, increases also the beliefs in the education as the source of marginal advantage, governments have become increasingly obsessed with the international rankings of measured educational outcomes. However the issue and impact of power on the educational institutions differentiate form in society to another. It is becoming important more than ever as the decision making in education is changing considerably. The main actors are no longer those most affected by education like the students, parents and the teachers but rather private agencies and international financial institutions (Stromquist 2002, p. 87).

International agencies compare patterns and results in different countries in order to improve the advice that they give to national governments and policy makers. The UNESCO, World Bank and OECD are amongst international agencies each emphasising their own aims varying from pedagogy, curriculum, economic and financial matters, which play an important part in the education arena. Their aim is to assist countries in designing and implementing successful policies to address the challenges that the educational systems are facing. They also create schemes for promoting lifelong learning in relation with other socio-economic policies (Bray 2007, p. 31). New ideas gained from international studies such as PISA, TIMSS and Survey -Lang can be tried to see if they will improve the education system and to understand why the performance of students in different countries differs (Shorrocks-Taylor & Jenkins 2000).

Since the late 1950's with the founding of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) such large scale
<https://assignbuster.com/what-can-be-gained-by-engaging-in-comparative-education-studies/>

comparative studies have taken on considerable significance in education. From the beginning the IEA has been committed to studying learning in the basic school subjects and to conducting on a regular basis survey of educational achievement. Over time, these 'outcome' data have been increasingly linked to analyses of the effects of curriculum and school organization upon learning and the relationship between achievement and pupil attitudes (Shorrocks- Taylor 2000, p. 14).

There are different methods on how to measure the comparative aspect which differs from theoretical grounded studies intended to build or test complex models of educational systems to descriptive studies whose purpose is to monitor different features of educational systems, practices and outcomes. The purpose of theoretically oriented studies is mainly to examine relationships among variables and look for casual explanations. It is designed to examine links between school achievement and such characteristics as curricula, teaching methods, family expectations and funding levels. These highlight the level of differences between schools or classes as well as on differences between students as the unit of analysis. (Bradburn & Gilford 1990, p. 5)

Belatedly, the intensification of international competition, spurred on by globalization, neo-liberalism and marketizing, has major implications for cross-national studies of educational achievement, for those engaged in or dealing with the powerful influence of national and international league tables, and for the theoretical frameworks that we employ in our analyses. If the funding of research is increasingly linked to commercial interests, for example, the potential for critical theory, or for alternative cultural

<https://assignbuster.com/what-can-be-gained-by-engaging-in-comparative-education-studies/>

perspectives to influence the construction of new knowledge, may be increasingly challenged. Questions of power and “ whose knowledge counts?”, in the process of development arise, perhaps, more strongly than ever before (reference from my lecture notes).

As Sultana stated, comparative education should go further than the concern with comparing “ like with like” (Sultana as cited in Borg 2009, p. 9). It focuses more on finding a particular point from where educational and related social phenomenon can be seen from different perspectives; create a deeper understanding of the dynamics as well come up with new ideas. Comparative education provides insights on higher education, educational innovation, teacher education, power and education researches each bringing the experience of the researcher’s country, or the country or the countries that researcher has studied and came together in order to share these issues in debating sessions.

Comparative education and globalization:

In a globalise world, schools have come under greater national enquiry regarding the ways they can contribute to or delay a national progress. Claxton (1998) has described the rapidly-changing times we are living as the ‘ Age of Uncertainty’ in which it is impossible to predict the state and shape of the world in few years time (as cited in Broadfoot 2000, p. 358).

The educational world today encounters systems which may eventually prove to be a revolution in what is to be taught, to whom and how, since, as Edmund King implies, ‘ all its established systems were developed for a world that no longer exists” (quoted in Broadfoot p. 267).

Accountability and educational transformation rose questioning on the education process itself. The heightened interest in and concern over education has encouraged educators to re-evaluate in the light of new global realities, the purpose of schooling, the underlying theories about the relationship between education and development and questioning about educator professionalism. (Watson as cited in Crossley 2002, p. 81)

The ways in which educators in different countries view these issues and the strategies employed to address them must be understood in the light of different cultural, social and political context in each country. By viewing the educational issue from the perspective of two diverse countries the researcher can identify factor that might be missed when viewing the issue within the context of own country alone. If the research area is related to researcher's own cultural environment, it is not always easy to perceive its special characteristics. The case may appear too understandable and non-problematic. " A fish cannot see that it is living in water" (quoted in <http://www2.uiah.fi/projects/metodi/172.htm>). Multiple cultural perspectives thinking and analytic frameworks from a multiplicity of discipline the research would provide an international context as well as tools for opening perspective to enhance the way of seeing education.

Critical thinking on Comparative education:

Comparative education and the critical perspective taking that comparative inquiry, help the researcher to go into a deeper analysis of the relationship among society, development, education and the role that citizens either directly or indirectly play in the education process. Through the development of comparative thinking skills researchers should be able to undertake <https://assignbuster.com/what-can-be-gained-by-engaging-in-comparative-education-studies/>

analyses of their home cultures and systems with a more understanding of the various cultural factors at play. Comparative education encourages both researchers and educators to ask questions like: “ What kind of educational policies, planning and teaching are appropriate and for what kind of society?” The field of comparative education focuses attention on what might be appropriate and inappropriate policy while encourage awareness of philosophies underlying educational policies and encourages interdisciplinary critique. (Klein 1990, 1996, Epstein 1983 as cited in Kubow & Fossum 2003, p. 7).

Comparative education is beneficial and necessary not only for scholars and policy makers but for education practitioners as well. As Gutek said, teachers function in two dimensions: as citizens of particular nation-states, they foster students’ national identity; and second as citizens of a global society, they recognize that possibilities of humans growth and threats to human survival going beyond national boundaries (Gutek 1993 as cited in Kubow & Fossum 2003, p. 251). Teachers must learn to look at other equivalent classroom and school practices throughout the world. As Stake (1978) said “ we observe that people intrinsically pursue the general by looking at the specific. People make sense out of the new circumstances they encounter by comparing that particulars to the universe that includes their own frames of reference. We have named the process of performing cross-cultural investigation and then deriving insights from these investigations the skills of comparative perspective taking” (quoted in Kubow & Fossum 2003, p. 252).

Schools are compared with arenas which constitute tension and combination of forces. In order to understand and control such condition, involves critical <https://assignbuster.com/what-can-be-gained-by-engaging-in-comparative-education-studies/>

skills and the ability to understand the political underlining of societal and educational circumstances (Kaplan 1991 as cited in Kubow & Fossum 2003, p. 252). These kinds of critical thinking can promote critical questions like: What is the intention of schooling? What are the equitable education and who decides? What is the appropriate balance between educator authority and accountability? What factors reinforce or hinder teacher professionalism? (Quoted from Kubow & Fossum 2003, p. 252).

The field of comparative education continues to define its identity and significance in the new thinking about education, society, colonialism and development. Ideas from post-foundational thinking, post-modernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism, are of great importance in comparative research because they deal with common metanarratives of progress, modernity, dominance and subordination that there have been the fulcrum of the main ideas in comparative education.(Mehta & Ninnes 2003, p. 238), Crossley 2002, p. 82).

Examples of Case studies:

Case study 1: Comparing literacy

The usefulness of comparative education is seen in the number of different case studies. An example of a case study is ' Literacy skills in Maltese-English bilingual children' by Rachael Xuereb (2009).

The study examines the reading and phonological awareness skills in English and Maltese of children whose mother tongue is Maltese and second language English. A sample of 50 typically developing Maltese children aging between 8 years 0 months to 10 years 5 months was chosen to participate in

<https://assignbuster.com/what-can-be-gained-by-engaging-in-comparative-education-studies/>

this study. The children acquired Maltese as a first language within the family and later acquired English as a second language through Kindergarten and/or the early school years.

The participants in this study attend a church school situated in the south-western part of the island. Since children start going to school at the age of 5 years, the children have been learning to read in Maltese and also in English.

For the purpose of this study, Maltese reading and reading-related tests were created to parallel the UK and US standardised assessments. All the children sat for the novel tests and the standardised tests. According to the results found by Xuereb, Maltese children read better in Maltese than in English, which is the language of instruction in most of the subjects.

Each child was tested on the following measures in both languages: word and non word reading, non word repetition, spelling, segmenting words and non words elision, rapid naming of letters, numbers and colours, forward memory for digits.

Increasing research has addressed this issue for bilingual students, in relationship to whether phonological awareness in the first language predicts phonological awareness in the second language (Quiroga, Lemos-Britton, Mostafapour, Abbott & Berninger, 2002). Studies comparing first language and second language decoding skills in readers of different orthographies suggest that these skills are positively correlated and that individual differences in the development of these skills can be predicted on the basis of underlying cognitive and linguistic abilities such as phonological skills,

memory, orthographic knowledge and speed of processing (Geva & Wade-Woolley, 1998 as cited in Xuereb 2009, p. 331).

This study aimed to find answer for how do Maltese-English bilingual children perform on reading and phonological tasks and to verify whether prior findings of cross-language transfer from first language phonological awareness to reading or to second language phonological awareness be replicated in this sample of Maltese-speaking students.

Case study 2: Comparing the role of gender and age on students' perceptions towards online education.

This study conducted by Fahme Dabaj, and Havva BaÅŸak, was conducted in order to question and analyze the perceptions and attitudes of the students to online distance education by means of email and the World Wide Web as the method of delivering instruction through on-line diploma programs offered by Sakarya University in Turkey with respect to their age and gender. The research was based on a questionnaire as a mean of data collection method.

The findings of the analysis explained that although the students registered to the online program by will, they preference was for the traditional face-to-face education due to the difficulty of the nonverbal communication, their lack of ability in using the technology required, and their belief in traditional face-to face learning more than online education.

The research methodology of this study used the quantitative statistical methods and techniques such as significance differences, correlation and the cross-tabulation distribution to find out if there is a significant relationship

<https://assignbuster.com/what-can-be-gained-by-engaging-in-comparative-education-studies/>

between the independent and the dependent variable questions, measuring the role of age and gender of students towards their perceptions regarding distant education. The quantitative data was collected by survey questionnaire and was analyzed via quantitative statistical methods. All the students enrolled in the distance education programs and the online courses in the autumn term of the 2005/2006 Academic Year took part in the research.

Regarding gender, the results proofed that the female students have a better awareness of the online education contrasting to the male students. Regarding age, the results showed that the older the students' preference moves towards attending face-to face classes.

Case study 3: Comparing different Art methodologies.

I also attempted to make a small comparative study in which I compared Art methodology adopted in a state school compared with that adopted by the Verdala International School. The Verdala International is a co-ed international school in which foreign students resident in Malta can attend. The Art department in this school is based on two Art Programs; the IG which is equivalent to O' level exam and the IB which is equivalent to the A' level exam.

My research was aimed at bringing out the difference in teachers' and students' approach towards the subject. The first difference which I pointed out was the level of organization in the state school's Art room in comparison with the "organized" chaos that ruled in the Verdala International. Both teachers' response to my comments about the Art room environment was

that it reflects the methodology they adopt towards the subject. Art lessons in the state school are more structured; students have to follow rules which hinder them from using their imagination freely. In both schools the lessons were introduced in the same manner there was a lot of teacher talk with the teacher orchestrating the whole thing. The children were only asked to participate when the teacher asked them for suggestions.

The two lessons differed in the way they developed while in the state school, the students followed the traditional method by copying the teacher's examples from the whiteboard and were very limited in experimentation, at Verdala International the students were much freer to experiment and be creative. The reason was that although the Art syllabi of both schools are very similar, the methodology adopted is different. The teacher at the state school believes that in order to "break the rules" in Art first the student has to learn them by using the traditional method - by copying.

While Art lessons at the state school are more exams oriented, although at Verdala International they do have an end of year test, the focus is more on helping students develop creative ideas. During my observation sessions at the state school, which were carried out in the beginning of November, the teacher consistently reminded the students about the exam. On the other hand at Verdala International the final test was never mentioned.

At the Verdala International I also tried to compare Maltese students who have been to a state school and are now attending Verdala International with foreign students who had been attending to Art classes in their own countries are now at Verdala. The aim of such comparison was to identify

students' perspectives of the methodologies used for the teaching of Art in Malta and abroad. The foreign students interviewed were from Italy, USA, Sweden, Germany, Russia and England. From the response given it resulted that the conservative Art methodology used in Maltese state schools is very similar to that in Russia and in the early years of the middle school in Germany.

Lessons at Verdala International are more similar to those in Italy where the students are active participants and able to take decisions on what they should do. While in state schools every lesson planned out by the teacher following the syllabus that is to be covered, at Verdala International the lesson is in the form of a group discussion. Each student decides on a theme that he/she would like work on and the teacher will facilitate his learning. This way, different students might be working on different projects unlike in state schools where everyone would be doing the same thing. Maltese students prefer more the methodology used at the Verdala International than the Art methodology used in the state school.

The research methodology of this study consisted of observation sessions, interviews with students both on individual bases and in groups, and interviews with four teachers (one at Verdala International and 3 at state school). The number of students that took part in this study was 45 students (22 at Verdala International and 23 at state school).

Conclusion

The comparative education area is composed by what researchers declare about its nature, origins, purposes, futures, by the " truths" people support

and by the struggle over what made “ true” comparative education (Mehta & Ninnes 2003, p. 240).

The significance in studying this area using intellectual accuracy, the working and foreign systems of education will result in our better fitted to study and understand our own while helps to extend and d