

Comparative Education

GULISTAN J. KERAWALLA

A survey of the trends in, and the present status of comparative education research necessitates a preliminary overview of the field, including conceptual considerations as also an examination of the approaches and methods used by comparative educationists. Against the resulting backdrop of the nature of comparative education, the current issues, themes and trends of research in the field can be studied.

COMPARATIVE EDUCATION: A DISCIPLINE AND A METHOD

Within the wider arena of educational research, comparative education occupies a unique position. It is viewed both as a subject of study and as a means to improve particular systems of education. From ancient times travellers to foreign lands have shown an interest in the way the education of children was undertaken in the countries of their visit. A more formal and conscious examination of foreign educational practices began largely in the 19th century, with the setting up of national school systems. Visits abroad by practicing educationists and educational administrators were planned, and foreign scholars were invited as, for instance, by Japan after the Meiji Restoration, to advise on how practices successful abroad, might be adopted for the reform of education at home. Cultural or selective cultural borrowing was the order of the day, when borrowing policies and practices from abroad to effectively solve educational problems at home was considered

not only desirable, but also possible.

While a few 19th century comparative educationists were uncritical borrowers, it was not till the beginning of the present century that the relationship between a nation's ethos and its system of education came to be recognised. Sadler's observation that, "the things outside the schools matter even more than the things inside the schools, and govern and interpret the things inside" (Sadler, M. 1900), was echoed by other comparative educationists and led to the introduction of the stage of interpretation which examined the "Why" of an educational system prior to borrowing. With this modification in approach, the formal examination of foreign systems of education continued in the present century and gained momentum in the post World War II period. The imperatives of national reconstruction in industrialised societies in the aftermath of the war, and expectations of educational independence in the wake of the political independence of former colonial nations, heightened interest in comparative studies in the search for models to reform one's own system of education.

Comparative education is viewed as a method when studies of foreign systems of education are undertaken for meliorist purposes, i.e. they are studied with the intention of improving one's own system of education.

The present century has also witnessed the emergence of comparative education as an academic discipline, which is introduced as a

subject of study in universities around the world. As an academic discipline it seeks to understand the process of education, to identify the underlying principles governing the educational systems and to better understand one's own system of education. As pointed out by Noah, "... the fundamental assertion of comparative study is that we can truly comprehend ourselves only in the context of a secure knowledge of other societies." (Noah, H. 1990). Through a comparative study of educational systems a description and classification of educational systems can be prepared, such as those provided by the UNESCO's World Surveys of Education, and the relationships between education and the other sub-systems of its social context examined. Referring to these academic aims of the subject which seek to enhance knowledge about education, Halls asserts that "in this case an increase in knowledge and the establishment of truth regarding education is arrived at, not by some 'logical' process, but by an 'analogical' one". (Halls, W.D. 1990). A large portion of the literature in this area emerges from universities as also from various international organizations such as UNESCO, the IBE, the IIEP, the OECD, the World Bank, the World Council of Comparative Education Societies and various regional and national level professional associations of comparative education.

There need, however, be no rigid distinction between comparative education as a discipline and as a method. Further, whether viewed as a field of pure or applied studies, the major question that arises today is regarding what 'comparative education' encompasses and what its dimensions are.

In its most literal sense, comparative education implies the examination of two or more educational operations, activities, processes or systems. Comparing two different methods of teaching a subject, or the performance of two groups undergoing a programme could, according to this definition, fall under the rubric of comparative education. The more generally accepted meaning of the

term, however, encompasses a broader approach which analyses comparatively the educational systems of two or more countries, viewed within their national context. In recent years, the field of comparative education has been widened to include one-nation or one-region studies, more appropriately called 'Area Studies'. The typology offered by Halls, W.D. (1990) includes within the canopy of 'comparative education' the categories of 'comparative studies', 'education abroad', 'international education' and 'development education'.

This broadening of the concept has considerably widened the extent of the field which today includes intra-national comparisons, as also comparisons between nations and between regions either of the total educational system or of specific themes or problems.

The academic dimension of comparative education is also vast. Unlike other specialists within the field of education such as the sociology of education or the history of education, which are grounded in the parent disciplines of sociology and history respectively, comparative education as a specialization within education is not grounded in a single discipline. From its early association with the disciplines of history and philosophy, comparative education is today related to a number of other disciplines such as sociology, economics, political science, anthropology and psychology. Moreover, as a comparative discipline, the parent discipline of comparative education is education, with the result that the content and approach of comparative studies in education are as wide as those of education itself. The research area of comparative education therefore extends to the entire field covered by educational studies, and like the latter it is also interdisciplinary. The variety of interests, areas, approaches and disciplinary affiliations it encompasses makes research in comparative education both challenging and difficult. It also raises questions regarding the appropriate models, techniques and methods to be used for making comparative studies of education.

METHODS OF COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

Methodological issues in comparative education involve considerations of the approaches adopted by researchers in comparative education, the techniques used by them to investigate the problems and the theoretical position from which the study is conducted.

As the same problem is to be examined in several different contexts, appropriate approaches and methods are required. Amongst the earliest approaches can be included the historical and the philosophical approaches of pioneers such as Hans, Kandel and Schneider, together with Mallinson's emphasis on national character. The sociological and cultural approaches of, among others, King subsequently ventured to study the context or 'ecology' in which policies have to be implemented. The hypothetico-deductive or the problem-solving approach of Holmes sought to make the study of comparative education scientific and give it predictive power. Bereday's inductive approach and Noah's and Eckstein's hypothetico-inductive approach drawn from the social sciences also facilitate scientific investigations in comparative education. Each of the approaches has its merits and limitations and the choice of the approach would depend on the methodological training of the researcher, his discipline affiliation, and the purpose of the research.

Different research methods are available in comparative studies—descriptive, historical, interpretative, survey research, experimental, quantitative methods, and predictive studies based on logical/qualitative analysis. Models and techniques need to be developed which would, under different societal conditions, facilitate theorising in education as well as solving educational problems and make the comparative study of education more scientific. More research in the methodology of comparative education needs to be encouraged.

RESEARCH TRENDS IN INDIA

The trend report on research in comparative

education in the *Fourth Survey of Research in education* (Buch, M.B., 1991) observes that "no trend is perceptible", research in this field being largely *ad hoc* and generally failing to offer conclusions which would inform policy. In all, 102 studies in comparative education have been reported up to the Fourth Survey. Twelve more studies have been included in the present volume (one of them being conducted in 1984 but not included in the Fourth Survey), and these together with the earlier studies form the basis of this trend report.

In quantitative terms, the addition of just twelve studies in this area over a five-year period (1988-92) of review of educational research conducted countrywide is a cause for concern as also query. Research in comparative education in the sense of cross-national or cross-cultural studies is not found to be very numerous or popular in India, compared to research in several other areas, due to the inherent practical difficulties and academic constraints in undertaking such research. The international nature of the field necessitates wide communication networks, facilities and funding for travel and stay abroad, a knowledge of the language of the country being studied and familiarity with its culture. Most research, particularly at the doctoral level, continues to remain unsponsored, with the result that scholars working without much financial backing, may tend to be wary of taking up comparative studies. On the academic side, few centres of comparative education or university departments specialising in this field exist, which could promote teaching and research in this area, train prospective researchers and generate an interest in and awareness of the potentiality of comparative education research to contribute to the theory and practice of education. Moreover, being interdisciplinary in nature, comparative education requires of its researchers a strong grounding in a discipline other than education, a requirement which may not always be met when entry qualifications to the doctoral programme generally require a bachelor's and/or master's degree in education.

This could perhaps explain in part the almost atheoretical nature of most comparative education researches in this country. Table 1 shows the decade-wise distribution of research conducted in comparative education in India.

Table 1
Decade-wise Distribution of Comparative Education Research

<i>Decade</i>	<i>Number of Studies</i>
1941 - 50	0
1951 - 60	0
1961 - 70	0
1971 - 80	36
1981 - 90	74
1991 - 92	4
Total	114

Comparative education research in this country did not take off till the 1970s, and picked up in the 1980s. Only four studies have been reported in the first two years of the present decade. Research carried out in this area outside the universities is negligible, all the twelve studies reported in this volume having been conducted in universities, and all, except one undertaken for the M.Phil. degree (Geetha, T. 1988), being undertaken at the doctoral level. One study (Zarin, H. 1989) has been conducted in the Department of Psychology and the rest in Departments of Education. In terms of university affiliation also, there is no clear pattern during 1988-92. While three studies are reported from Panjab University and two from Jamia Millia Islamia, the remaining seven of the twelve studies reviewed are from seven different universities.

The nature of comparative education research undertaken during the five years under review can be ascertained by examining the units of comparison, the methodology used and the theoretical positions adopted, the themes researched, and the contribution of their findings.

Units of Comparison

In terms of units of comparison, three studies (Ahari, A.A. 1990; Ali, M.M. 1991; and Bhagat, M.S.S. 1988) are single-nation studies undertaken apparently by students from the respective countries (Iran, Bangladesh and Nepal) studying in India, in which case they do not fall strictly under Halls' category within Comparative Education of "Education Abroad" by which he means "study of the aspects of an educational system or systems other than one's own". (Halls, W.D. 1990). The study by Al-Habshneh, Z.A. (1991) is a single-nation study with a difference in that the subjects of his study are foreign (Jordanian) students studying in Indian universities. The remaining studies compare aspects of education in two or more countries and can therefore more appropriately be classified as studies in comparative education. Of these, one study (Ramesh Mohan, C. 1992) is a cross-cultural study of one tribal group each from Canada and India.

Methodology

A wide range of approaches and methods are available in comparative education, the choice depending on the type of issues investigated and the purpose of the study. The majority of the studies reviewed in the *Third Survey* (Buch, M.B. 1987) were found to have employed the Descriptive Method. This trend appears to continue in the present survey. The method-wise distribution of the twelve studies reviewed here is as given in Table 2.

The majority of the studies continue to be of the descriptive survey type, adopt the inductive approach, quantify data and undertake statistical testing of hypotheses. Among the exceptions to this mode are the study by Chitundu Wellington, A. (1990) which used content analysis, the study by Geetha, T. (1988) which employed documentary analysis, and the cross-cultural study by Ramesh Mohan, C. (1992) which undertook a Social Anthropological

Table 2

Method-wise Distribution of Comparative Education Research

<i>Research Method Employed</i>	<i>Number of Studies</i>
Descriptive	6
Sociological and Anthropological	2
Historical	2
Philosophical-cum-Historical	1
Exploratory	1
Total	12

Survey of education in tribal groups in two cultures and analysed the social and cultural causes of the lack of education in the two communities studied. By and large, interpretative and predictive studies are found to be absent. Most of the studies do not appear to have looked beyond education in the social context or 'ecology' in which the problem being studied has appeared, or attempted to examine the relationship between education and other sub-systems of society. The hypothetico-deductive or the problem-solving approach which, by facilitating prediction, is advocated as an instrument in the planned reform of education has also not been employed by researchers. In terms of the methodology employed, few studies in comparative education in this country have moved much beyond providing descriptions of educational systems and processes.

RESEARCH THEMES

The themes or topics selected for research do not indicate any distinguishable trend over the decades. The Third Survey classified studies in comparative education into six categories and this number increased to nine in the Fourth Survey, of which four categories overlapped with the categories in the earlier classification. These are the areas of Teachers and Teacher Education, Education and Society, Non-formal and Adult Education, and Psychological Characteristics. These areas have continued to receive attention from comparative educationists

during the period under review, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Theme-wise Distribution of Comparative Education Research

<i>Research Themes</i>	<i>Number of Studies</i>
Teachers and Teacher Education	2
Education and Society/ Social Context	3
Non-Formal and Adult Education	1
Psychological Characteristics of Students	1
Higher Education	1
Curriculum Construction	1
Physical Education	1
Commercial/Business Education	1
Tribal Education	1
Total	12

Teachers and Teacher Education

Up to 1986, 19 studies have been reported in this area, dealing with in-service teacher education; programmes, approaches and progress of teacher education; tests for admission to teacher education courses; role conflict of women educationists; teachers' morale and organisational climate; role and role perception of teachers'; teachers' attitudes towards innovation and towards their profession; and extension service programmes of teachers' colleges. The country selected for comparison in ten of the studies was Thailand, with Philippines and the U.S.A. being studied in two researches.

In the present survey two studies can be classified in this area. The study by Bhagat, M.S.S. (1988) investigated the wastage of teacher education in secondary schools of Nepal. The causes of wastage in teacher education have been examined in relation to intelligence, manifest needs of personality, vocational aspirations and attitude towards teaching by comparing the 'stay-in' teachers and 'drop-outs' from the teaching profession. The data collected

are subjected to statistical analysis. The implications of the study are rather trite, in that they state that "the teaching profession must be accorded a higher status in society and teachers must be paid better salaries in order to attract better talent and prevent wastage in teacher education."

Leeiavathy, T.K. (1984) compared teacher education programmes in some developed and developing countries. The countries studied were England, the Soviet Union, the U.S.A., Nigeria and India. The following aspects of teacher education were studied: pattern and organisation; selection procedure; curriculum provision; examination and certification; and administration. On the basis of the comparison of teacher education in the five countries the study aimed at suggesting steps for revitalising the teacher education programmes in India.

Education and Society

Education and Society do not emerge as a well-defined area of research and subsumes a variety of studies covering the sociological and cultural dimensions of education. In the Fourth Survey, 23 studies have been categorised as sociological studies encompassing a variety of issues. These include studies on students' conceptions of life; student indiscipline; educational television; the language problem; universalisation of primary education; education as an agent of change; social background of students and teachers; attitudes of the community towards family planning and functional literacy; effect of education on the modernisation of the rural population; interaction between school and society; and attitudes of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes girls.

The studies included under this area in the present survey cover equally diverse areas. Al-Habshneh, Z.A. (1991) conducted a sociological study of Jordanian students in Indian universities. Working on a sample of 400 Jordanian students the study examined their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, their adjustment problems, attitudes, values and

aspirations and their perceptions regarding their expected future role as agents of social change, modernisation and development. The study provides comprehensive profiles of various aspects of life in Jordan and describes the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of Jordanian students. It found that a majority of Jordanian students were well-adjusted in India but faced educational problems. Their social perceptions had broadened and modernised considerably and they visualised their future roles in a realistic manner.

A comparative study of socio-cultural and educational conditions in the northeastern region of Thailand and India was done by Kettate, B. (1988). The sample was drawn from teachers, students and the out-of-school population. Using statistical techniques the study found similarities and differences in the social and cultural conditions of life in the two regions studied, but little effort was made to explain or interpret the same.

The final study under this theme is that conducted by Rajpal, R.K. (1990) who compared the concept and practices for equalisation of educational opportunities in the UK, the USA and India. The philosophical-cum-historical method was used to examine the achievement of equalisation of educational opportunities in the countries under study, and to find out the relevance and application of the practices in the UK and the USA. for India. The study suggests the incorporation of area schools, neighbourhood schools, educational parks, Open School Boards, opportunity schools, and additional resources for education in the Indian System of education.

Non-formal and Adult Education

Up to the Fourth Survey seven studies were conducted in this area crucial for developing countries. The studies examined social mobility, receptivity and demand for ETV programmes; need for non-formal education; attitude of teacher educators towards programmes of non-formal education; and development of programmed learning material of B.Ed. level.

Interestingly, five of these seven studies were about non-formal education in Thailand.

During the period under review only one study is reported in this area. Chitundu Wellington, A. (1990) compared Adult Education in India and Zambia. Using the historical approach, the study examined the administration and organisation of adult education in the two countries; identified the similarities and differences in the patterns, programmes and policies of adult education in India and Zambia; evaluated the adult education programmes; and made suggestions and recommendations for future upgradation of the programmes.

Psychological Characteristics of Students

This is a broad category of themes covering studies in n-Ach. hope of success and fear of failure among students; personality and achievement motivation; locus of control and adjustment pattern of adolescents; personality characteristics of children; temperament, emotional characteristics and intelligence, and anxiety level among students.

The solitary study under this theme reviewed in this survey was conducted in the department of psychology by Zarin, H. (1989) who undertook cross-cultural comparisons of compassion, aspirations and values among students of India, Ghana and Zambia. Using statistical techniques of analysis, the researcher identified the similarities and differences among students from India, Ghana and Zambia on the psychological variables studied and attributed these to the prevalent social structure in the three societies.

Higher Education

Ahari, A.A. (1990) studied the role of Islamic government in the development of higher education in Iran as perceived by university administrators, teachers and students. The study investigated policy formulation, planning, financing, administration, physical and human resources, the aims of higher education, its curriculum, methods of teaching and evaluation.

The study found that significant differences do not exist in the perceptions of administrators, teachers and students regarding the role of the Islamic government in the development of higher education in Iran.

Curriculum Construction

A study conducted for the M.Phil. degree by Geetha, T. (1988) made an international comparison of the geography syllabus on the basis of data from the UK, the USA, the USSR and India. Using the method of documentary analysis, the study concluded that the 'vocational touch' in the form of development of skills at the school level is necessary in India and that spiral sequencing can be attempted in the geography syllabus in India.

Physical Education

Mann, R.S. (1992) compared selected physical and physiological abilities of American and Indian students in the age group 10-16 years. The study compared the anthropometric measures, motor abilities and physiological abilities of Indian and American students, and found the American students to be superior on most of the measures. The study, however, offered no explanations for the country-wise or age-wise differences observed.

Business Education

Ali, M.M. (1991) investigated the problems of business education offered by sixteen government commercial institutes in Bangladesh. The problem of business education in Bangladesh is found to be related to physical facilities, curriculum and courses, teaching aids, instructional programmes, apprenticeship training, visits, field trips and co-curricular activities, teaching problems and working conditions of teachers.

Tribal Education

A cross-cultural study by Ramesh Mohan, C.

(1992) examined the education of the Stoney natives of Canada and the tribals of Rajpipla, Gujarat, India. The study investigated the variables which "seem to have influenced" the educability of the two communities during an almost identical colonial and post-colonial situation in Canada and India. A social anthropological survey, the analysis shows that the major cause of lack of education of both communities may be politically identical but their social and cultural causes are quite different.

The preceding discussion on the research themes examined in comparative education reinforces the earlier observation that no definite trend is in evidence regarding the lines of research followed. Often the rationale for the selection of a theme for study is not clear, and its findings reiterate the obvious. It was mentioned earlier that the parent discipline of comparative education as a comparative field being education, the content of comparative studies in education is as wide as those of education itself, and this is amply illustrated by the wide variety of research themes of the studies under review. As many as nine categories of research themes are required for classifying the twelve studies reviewed and even within the same theme where more than a single study are included, namely teacher education and education and society, no clear pattern or direction emerges. A spirit of *ad hocism* appears to prevail in the selection of topics for study.

Further, it is found that no researcher has undertaken a study on the methodological issues in comparative education, though research in this area, in the context of education in developing countries, needs to be encouraged. Similarly, studies focusing on constructing models and typologies and refining techniques of comparative studies are totally absent.

CONCLUSION

The contribution of comparative education research in India to (a) the reform of educational systems, and (b) an increased understanding of

and knowledge in the discipline of education needs to be examined.

Though research in education has been growing in the post-Independence period in India, research in comparative education has not registered any quantitative leap. While more research *per se*, without a consideration of its quality, need not be a desirable trend, it is useful to consider the factors responsible for the paucity of research in this increasingly important area. All the studies reported in this area have been conducted by research students. The constraints of time and finance faced by a postgraduate or doctoral researcher could be a possible factor dissuading scholars from taking up research in an area which, because of its international nature, is likely to be expensive and possibly time-consuming. It is not surprising, therefore, that a majority of the studies in this area are conducted by foreign scholars in Indian universities. Most of these studies are single-nation studies dealing with aspects of education in the home country of the researcher and do not attempt any comparative analysis. It is possible that, but for the fact that these studies deal with educational issues in a context other than Indian, they could have been reviewed under any other relevant chapter of the survey. The need for more sponsored, post-doctoral and team research in this area, undertaken by specialists trained in the discipline of comparative education cannot be over emphasised.

Regarding the nature of the studies conducted, it is observed that there is a great diversity in the topics of investigation—a veritable amalgam of research interests. To be able to systematically extend existing knowledge about education and/or help in the reform of particular systems of education, comparative education research needs to be properly planned, have an articulated theoretical position, and employ an appropriate methodology. Also, the problems or issues to be studied need to be carefully identified as also the countries/regions chosen for comparison examined with regard to their appropriateness for answering the

questions being addressed.

For the studies under review, on the basis of the available research abstracts, no justification appears to be offered either for the selection of topics of investigation or for the choice of countries within which these are examined. The resulting investigation, then, is at best of academic interest. Further, most of the studies are conducted without an explicitly stated conceptual framework. Consequently, the theoretical underpinnings of the studies are unclear and their contribution to theory building negligible.

Methodologically, the studies are mainly of the descriptive survey type. As with other areas in educational research, the studies are largely of an empirical nature and the urge to quantify, formulate a number of hypotheses and use statistical techniques of analysis is in evidence. The result is the throwing up of a number of relationships between variables, sometimes spurious, and of similarities of differences among groups which are not always explained. Being atheoretical and in the absence of logical analysis, the conclusions tend to be drawn in a mechanical fashion. In such an event, while a study may conclude, for instance, that significant differences exist in the perceptions of different groups on an issue, it may throw little light on the nature of these perceptions and why they differ. For this to be possible, logical analysis, qualitative approaches to data processing and the researcher's ingenuity and insight for interpretation become crucial inputs. Moreover, while it is true that for a meaningful comparison the problem of aspects being studied needs to be viewed and explained within its specific social context, this exercise appears to be missing in all except a few studies. Unless the context-specific societal influences are identified, anticipating the outcomes of an adopted policy or reform may not be possible.

For research in comparative education to inform educational policy-making, the topics selected for study need to be timely in relation to the problems existing in a society; the

investigation has to be characterised by methodological appropriateness and finesse to yield valid and reliable findings; and the dissemination of findings ensured to facilitate their discussion and consideration by decision-makers. The availability of research based knowledge is necessary both at the stage of introducing new policies as also for evaluating their outcomes. Knowledge with predictive power is required to enable educational decision-makers to identify the possible obstacles to effective policy implementation and anticipate the likely consequences of policy options.

It should be possible, on the basis of a systematic appraisal of educational issues faced by developing countries, to outline priority areas of research on which comparative studies can be undertaken in India. University departments of education and higher education institutions involved in teaching and research in education need to be strengthened in the field of comparative education. A few institutions having specialists in the field can be identified and given additional inputs, including good communication networks, so as to create centres which would specialise in this area both with regard to its teaching and research. The teaching of comparative education at the post-graduate level needs to be encouraged and improved, and taken beyond the stage of historico-philosophical studies dealing merely with descriptions of several systems of education. While the masters' degree programme in most cases provides an introduction to the subject, it is at the doctoral level that the training of future comparative educationists can take place. Stringent measures for selecting candidates, providing them thorough and rigorous research preparation and controlling the quality of the process and product of research cannot be over-emphasised if specialists in comparative education are to be prepared who can contribute both to the improvement of education through applied studies and extend its boundaries through fundamental research.

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