

# **INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION**

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## CHAPTER 1

# AN INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

This chapter explores:

- What comparative education is;
- How the field has developed over the years;
- The purpose of comparative education;
- Who compares;
- The challenges of undertaking comparative research.



### Activity 1.1 Defining terms

Before beginning this chapter, write down a definition of comparative education. At the end of the chapter, reflect on your definition. Is comparative education what you thought? How might this be similar to and different from international education?

Comparative education is often used interchangeably with international education. While these two fields certainly overlap, it can be argued that they are two distinct areas of study. There has been a long history of debate

pertaining to the identity of comparative and international education, often called ‘twin’ fields (Bray, 2010), but what exactly is comparative education and how is it different from international education? This chapter aims to explain the nature and purpose of comparative education.

## Historical development of comparative education

In order to define what the field is today, an understanding of the history shaping it is important. Many contemporary academics argue of the importance in understanding the historical development of comparative education in order to appreciate just how far the field has come from its earliest roots. Not only is there disagreement as to the definition of the twin fields, but disparity also exists in identifying their historical roots. How far back does comparative education go? When did it emerge as a distinct field of study?

Noah and Eckstein (1969) claim that the historical development of comparative education can be identified by five distinct stages, each with its own aims. The first stage is often referred to as ‘travellers’ tales’; stories were brought back from foreign travel and were generally descriptive in nature. When this first stage begins is less clear but for Noah and Eckstein it pre-dates the nineteenth century. Some writers go back as far as ancient times, citing examples from the Greeks and Romans and in particular how they admired the ‘discipline of Spartan education’ (Crossley & Watson, 2003, p. 12).

According to Phillips (2000), there was a large group of British travellers who fell into Noah and Eckstein’s first stage. They visited countries such as Germany out of ‘cultural and general curiosity’ and they wrote with ‘varying degrees of sophistication’ (Phillips, 2000, p. 49). At this time, these tales did not systematically compare or analyse educational practice so have been dismissed by many scholars. However, others (see Rust, Johnstone & Allaf, 2009) have asserted that while these tales may have been descriptive they had much value and have been harshly judged by those who have a narrow view as to what counts as scholarly activity.



### Activity 1.2 Travellers’ tales

Have you ever travelled to another country and come back with an education-related story to share? Or do you have friends who are from another country? Have they told you about education in their own country? Why would or wouldn’t this be classified as research?

The second stage described by Noah and Eckstein (1969) begins from the nineteenth century. This phase coincides with the rise of national education systems in Europe. During the 1800s countries such as France, Germany and Great Britain were establishing national systems of schooling which

eventually became free and universal by the end of the century. Many policy makers had great interest in the organisation and practice of education in other countries in order to help them devise their own. Noah and Eckstein (1969) argue that the work conducted in this stage was still very similar to the travellers' tales in previous years. Many of the writings during this time were 'encyclopedic descriptions of foreign school systems' (Noah & Eckstein, 1969, p. 5) and subjective in nature. 'These visitors came with a distinct purpose – to learn from a foreign example and through such learning to help improve the circumstances in their home countries' (Phillips, 2000, p. 49).

The third stage occurred around the middle of the nineteenth century and is still characterised by the accumulation of information in an encyclopaedic manner. However, Noah and Eckstein (1969) suggest that this exchange of scholars, students and publications was in the interest of promoting international understanding rather than in the interest of advancing one's own educational interests.

The fourth stage begins around the end of the nineteenth century. In this stage, a social science approach was beginning to develop as 'studies of foreign schooling became to a considerable extent studies of national character and the institutions that help form it' (Noah & Eckstein, 1969, p. 6). The recognition of the role of education in shaping society became important in this stage, as did the idea of cause and effect, and that national character determines education.

The fifth stage occurs after the First World War and coincides with the rise in statistical techniques in the social sciences. The adoption of quantitative methods after the Second World War and the empirical orientation of the social sciences began to reshape comparative education (Noah & Eckstein, 1969).



### Activity 1.3 Historic stages

Think about how comparative education has developed using Noah and Eckstein's five stages. Can you find any similarities between them and your own academic development? What criticisms can you think of regarding these five stages? Do you think the field developed in a linear fashion?

Similarly, in his classic book *Comparative Method in Education*, Bereday (1964) writes of phases in the history of comparative education. However, for Bereday the first phase begins in the nineteenth century and lasts for about 100 years. Like many other scholars (e.g. Green, 2003; Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2008; Acosta & Centeno, 2011), Bereday believes that the Frenchman Marc-Antoine Jullien, or Jullien de Paris, as he is also known, was 'the first scientifically minded comparative educator' (Bereday, 1964, p. 7). Jullien's aim was to improve French education by identifying the

best schools in Europe and examining how they were organised, the teaching methods they used and what successful improvements they had implemented. Many writers in the field have called him the ‘father’ of comparative education as he was the first to use the term ‘comparative education’ (Crossley & Watson, 2003) and to use formal models of analysis (Gautherin, 1993). In Jullien’s book, *The Esquisse d’un ouvrage sur l’éducation compare* or *Sketch and Preliminary Views on Comparative Education*, published in 1817, unlike his predecessors, he provided a ‘systematic comparative classification of education systems, based on rudimentary questionnaire surveys’ (Green, 2003, p. 84). According to Gautherin (1993), by using the comparative method successfully employed in anatomy, Jullien was trying to advance the science of education. Although his work was largely neglected throughout his lifetime, the first course on the science of education was officially introduced at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1883 (Masemann, 2006).

Bereday called this first phase in comparative education the period of ‘borrowing’ because ‘comparison of the collected information was then undertaken in order to make available the best practices of one country for transplantation to others’ (Bereday, 1964, p. 7).



#### Activity 1.4 Educational borrowing

What practices do you think early writers in the field reported on? Do you think borrowing these practices and transplanting them in your own country is effective? Why or why not?

For Bereday (1964), the second phase, called the period of ‘prediction’, occurred during the first half of the twentieth century and was led by the British educationalist Sir Michael Sadler. Like Jullien de Paris, Sadler was also interested in improving the English education system so looked to other systems, namely those in France, the USA and Germany, in order to draw comparisons. In his quest for reform, he became ‘aware of the wider social implications any kind of educational innovation must have’ (Mallinson, 1981, pp. 176–177). Scholars at this time paid attention to the relationship between education and society and the social causes underlying pedagogical practice. There was now a shift from cataloguing descriptive data to examining the social and cultural factors influencing education. In Kandel’s classic text, *Studies in Comparative Education* (1933, p. xi), he writes: ‘The problems and purposes of education have in general become somewhat similar in most countries; the solutions are influenced by differences of tradition and culture peculiar to each.’ As a result, educators became much more careful when transferring ideas and practice from one country to

another. Bereday (1964, p. 8) called this phase in comparative education as ‘the period of prediction because the purpose of comparative study was now not primarily borrowing but predicting the likely success of a system of education in one country on the basis of the observation of precedents and similar experiences of other countries’.

At the time of writing his book, comparative education had only just embarked on the third phase, which Bereday called the period of ‘analysis’. Bereday (1964, p. 9) believed ‘that before prediction and eventual borrowing is attempted there must be a systematization of the field in order to expose the whole panorama of national practices in education’. Early scholars, such as Kandel (1933), even called for the development of better methods in the field. There was no universal agreement as to what kind of methods and systematisation that comparativists should follow. This disagreement was evident in much of the scholarly writing in the field after the Second World War.

However, critics such as Epstein (2008, p. 374) argue that the widespread view that comparative education ‘evolved mainly in Darwinian-style stages of development’ is misunderstood. Others believe that separating out the history of the field into phases is over-simplistic and that they ‘are not necessarily linear or consistent across time, cultures or individuals’ (Crossley & Watson, 2003, p. 21). William Brickman, another key figure in the field, asks us to challenge the role of Marc-Antoine Jullien as the ‘father’ of comparative education and asserts that there were, perhaps, others before him who used analytical approaches in their comparative studies (Brickman, 2010). Despite criticism, it is widely acknowledged that both Bereday and Noah and Eckstein’s books have contributed greatly to the field (Bray et al., 2007).

What is the early history of comparative education in other parts of the world? Comparative education was developing in countries of Europe, North America and Asia between the latter parts of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century (Masemann, 2006). However, the historical development of comparative education in mainland China, for example, can arguably date back further than the ‘traveller’ tales of Western Europe. Due to its long history of civilisation, cases of ‘borrowing’ and ‘lending’ can be traced back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) and the Tang Dynasty (618–906 AD) where the influence of Indian Buddhism on Chinese education were evident (Bray & Qin, 2001).

In the Middle East between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, scholars travelled extensively in the Arab region and their accounts represent the first comparative education documents in the region (Benhamida, 1990, in Halls, 1990). Like in the West, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, the establishment of public schooling required a more systemic way of studying foreign education. It was not until the 1940s and 1950s that comparative education, led by the prominent Syrian Sati al-Husari (1882–1968), began to develop into the field we understand as it is today (Benhamida, 1990, in Halls, 1990).

In Latin America during the nineteenth century, there are examples of ‘traveller tales’ from those such as José María Luis Mora from Mexico, Andrés Bello from Venezuela, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento from Argentina, and José Pedro Varela from Uruguay, who looked at education practices that they could borrow from Europe and the USA (Acosta & Centeno, 2011). For example, Sarmiento, an intellectual and social activist in Argentina, travelled to France, Prussia, Switzerland, Italy, Spain and England to learn new ideas in his quest to bring education to the masses and improve the social conditions of women and children in particular (Bravo, 1994).

In the twentieth century, the Second World War had a tremendous influence on the field of comparative and international education (international education will be discussed in Chapter 7). Many international organisations which undertake comparative research in education, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the World Bank, were created to help rebuild a world shattered by war (Crossley & Watson, 2003).

## Comparative education societies and journals

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Over the years, other organisations have played a key role in shaping comparative education. The first Comparative Education Society (renamed in 1969 as the Comparative and International Education Society, or CIES) was formed in the USA in 1956. Other societies soon followed in Europe and elsewhere. The main purpose of the CIES is to foster cross-cultural understanding, scholarship, academic achievement and societal development through the international study of educational ideas, systems and practices. The Society’s members include more than 2,000 academics, practitioners and students from around the world (CIES, 2012). The society consists of not only educators but also historians, sociologists, economists, psychologists and anthropologists. This multidisciplinary approach reflects the field at large, adding to the variety and richness of the research and activities that the society undertakes.

In 1970, the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) was established to bring together these newly created comparative education societies (Masemann, Bray & Manzon, 2008) and currently meets every three years to discuss international issues in education. It is a non-government organisation (NGO) and works together with UNESCO. It was created to advance the field of comparative education and also promote research involving scholars in various countries. Research topics include theory and methods in comparative education, education of women and girls, teacher education and education for peace and justice (WCCES, 2012).

Now, there are now over 36 member societies: four Africa, six Americas, 16 Asia and Middle East, 16 Europe, and one in Oceania. The size and

**Table 1.1 Comparative education societies 1950s–1960s**

<b>Comparative and International Societies (1950–1970)</b>	<b>Dates founded</b>
Comparative and International Education Society (formerly Comparative Education Society) (CIES)	1956
Comparative Education Society in Europe (CESE)	1961
Japan Comparative Education Society (JCES)	1965
Comparative and International Education Society of Canada	1967
Korean Comparative Education Society (KCES)	1968

membership of these societies varies, as does the year in which they were formed; some have been established since the 1970s (e.g. the Dutch Speaking Society for Comparative Studies in Education or, in Dutch, *Nederlandstalig Genootschap voor Vergleijkende Studie van Opvoeding en Onderwijs*, (NGVO)); others later, such as the Gulf Comparative Education Society which was formed in 2008. The main goals of each of these societies are similar to and in line with the WCCES, which is primarily to promote research and scholarly exchange in the field of comparative education. In order to do that, many of these societies produce academic journals and host conferences to share research and ideas.



### **Activity 1.5 Comparative education societies**

Have a look at the following comparative education society websites and their respective journals:

The Spanish comparative education society (SEEC) available at: [www.sc.ehu.es/sfwseec/index\\_en.htm](http://www.sc.ehu.es/sfwseec/index_en.htm)

The Australian and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society (ANZCIES) available at: [www.iejcomparative.org/](http://www.iejcomparative.org/)

The Comparative and International Education Society of Canada (CIESC) available at: [www.iejcomparative.org/](http://www.iejcomparative.org/)

What are the stated objectives of these societies? What topics are published in their journals? To what extent do you feel they meet these objectives?

Since their inception in the late 1950s, these societies have contributed greatly to the advancement of the field through their research and promotion of it, and in the 1960s, comparative education embarked on a whole new era of scholarly activity. By this time, there were a number of prominent comparativists such as Nicolas Hans, Issac Kandel and Edmund King, in the USA, Europe and elsewhere.

As well as societies, a number of comparative education journals were established in the twentieth century, many being the official journals of the societies with which they were affiliated. The first comparative education journal was produced in Germany in 1931 under three titles (German, English and French): *Internationale Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft*, *International Education Review* and *Revue Internationale de Pédagogie*. The journal was interrupted briefly several times but started again permanently in 1955 with the English name changed to *International Review of Education* (Bray, 2003a). In 1957, the Comparative Education Society (now the CIES) launched their official journal entitled *Comparative Education Review*. The journal ‘investigates education throughout the world and the social, economic, and political forces that shape it ... [its aim is] to advance knowledge and teaching in comparative education studies’ (CIES, 2012).

## Methodological debates

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In the 1960s and 1970s, the field was embroiled in debates about methodology. In other words, disagreement arose as to how research in the field should be carried out. These debates reflected what was happening in the wider social sciences where positivism had dominated academia since the nineteenth century. From a positivist perspective, the laws of science typically used to study and understand the physical world are applied to the social world. If we can find the laws of cause and effect that govern society, we might be able to predict and control it. Many such as Noah and Eckstein (1969) argued in their seminal text, *Toward a Science of Comparative Education*, that researchers in the field should adopt a positivist or scientific approach using quantitative methods. In fact, they applauded their predecessors, such as Sadler, Kandel and Hans, for their qualitative attempts to explain the relationship between society and education. However, they felt that in order for comparative education to fulfil its potential for education planning, it had to offer a means of reliable prediction and without a quantitative base; they felt that this could not be suitably achieved (Noah & Eckstein, 1969).

Much of the work carried out during the ‘borrowing’ phase of comparative education in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was criticised by post-war educationalists (Crossley & Watson, 2003). The criticism stemmed from the fact that previous research had been mostly historical, descriptive and explanatory. Many thought this ‘approach lacked scientific rigour because it failed to draw causative links between schools and society’ (Crossley & Watson, 2003, p. 26). Therefore, through the scientific approach, researchers such as Bereday (1964) and Noah and Eckstein (1969) were trying to see if it were possible to identify laws governing the relationship between education and society (Crossley & Watson, 2003). Indeed, Bereday (1964) writes: ‘As in all social sciences,

this final stage of the discipline is concerned with the formulation of “laws” or “typologies” that permit an international understanding and a definition of the complex interrelation between the schools and the people they serve’ (Bereday, 1964, p. 25).



### Activity 1.6 Scientific laws and comparative education

How can you apply the scientific approach to the study of education systems and the societies that they are a part of? What are the benefits and limitations of this approach?

However, as stated previously, not everyone in the field agreed with the ‘scientific’ approach being proposed. In fact, Edmund King, a professor of Comparative Education in King’s College, University of London, and editor of the journal *Comparative Education* from 1978 to 1992 was one such critic. King (1965) believed that comparative education is really about the study of human behaviour and is therefore complex.

Let us take a single example from several dangerous fantasies in our field. We are sometimes invited to simplify our research work and make it more ‘scientific’ by inventing some formula or ‘theoretical construct’ of a near-mathematical type that will enable us to ‘identify’, to ‘classify’, and to ‘predict’. Some misguided people seem to resemble unmathematical schoolboys, hoping to find a routine formula for the magic solution of equations, or for working out percentages and dividends. Perhaps it works in mathematics. It will not work with behaviour.

(Edmund King, 1965, p. 151)

King (1965) also criticised the problem approach as proposed by Bereday (1964). Bereday believed that this was an essential part of the research process. ‘It involves a selection of one theme, one topic, and the examination of its persistence and variability throughout the representative educational systems’ (Bereday, 1964, p. 23). For Bereday, solutions to these problems can be found by examining how others in the world have solved similar ones. In fact, Kandel (1933) listed a number of problems which he felt were universal among nations. Some of the problems posed by Kandel over 80 years ago (see below) may seem fairly relevant today, even in the ever-changing educational landscape. However, looking at them critically, were these problems really universal and are they still today? Furthermore, King (1965) argued that without careful attention to sociological, psychological or economic perspectives, this approach could be seen as amateurish and even ‘dangerous’.

Kandel's selected 'problems of education' (1933, p. xviii) were as follows:

- What is the place of private education and of private schools?
- What is the scope of post-elementary or secondary education?
- What should be the curriculum in each type of school?
- How are teachers prepared and what is their status?
- How can standards be maintained? What should be the place of examinations?
- Who shall formulate curricula and courses of study?
- What is the meaning of equality of educational opportunity?

Bray, Adamson and Mason (2007) point out that debates concerning methodology were not happening equally around the world and the work emanating from English-speaking countries came to dominate the literature. By the 1980s, attempts to exert one single method over another had subsided and the debate over methodology waned (Altbach & Kelly, 1986, cited in Bray et al., 2007). New concerns emerged in the field with the arrival of the concept of globalisation in the late 1980s. Current debates have centred on the relationship between globalisation and education and the challenges this poses for comparative education (see Dale, 2005). This relationship will be explored in Chapter 8.

### **Comparative education: A discipline?**

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Over the years, many have been concerned with whether comparative education is a discipline, a field of study, an approach or a method – a way of collecting data. Can comparative education really be considered a discipline? In order to consider this, the first question has to be 'what is a discipline?' Traditional disciplines such as history, economics, sociology and psychology have their own departments and offer degrees in the subject at colleges and universities. They have an accepted and established way of doing research and producing knowledge, often published in their own academic journals. There is no single method in comparative education nor is there any agreement as to which method is best. In fact, Bereday wrote that 'comparative education relies on the methods of a host of other fields, from philosophy to psychology, from literature to statistics...' (Bereday, 1964, p. x).

Some might ask, 'does it really matter?' While others see that it really does, Manzon (2011) believes that this lack of clarity concerning the nature and identity of comparative education is problematic. She writes: 'How can a field of study survive, develop and perpetuate itself if its scholarly community are unclear, much less unanimous, about their field's

identity, aims and contents? (Manzon, 2011, p. 2) Much of the literature in the field focuses on this exact debate.

Can students acquire degrees in comparative education like they can in other disciplines, such as history or sociology? Comparative education was first taught as a course or module by James E. Russell at Teachers College, Columbia University, USA, in 1899 (Bereday, 1963). The title of the course was Comparative Study of Educational Systems. According to a university announcement, the course was 'designed to present a comprehensive view of a typical foreign school system and to aid students in making intelligent comparisons of the practical workings of this system with other systems at home and abroad' (Bereday, 1963, p. 189). Furthermore, during the academic year 1899–1900, special attention was given to the national education of Germany as compared with characteristic features of the systems of France, England and America.

Elsewhere, the first comparative education courses were taught by Isaac Kandel at Manchester University, England, in 1905; by Peter Sandiford in Canada at the University of Toronto in 1913; and in the 1920s at other universities in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Uganda (Manzon, 2011). Furthermore, Manzon reports that in the 1930s, comparative education subjects were also taught in the Far East: at Tokyo University in Japan; in China at Beijing Normal University and at the University of Hong Kong. In the 1940s, similar trends were also seen in Brazil, Cuba and Australia, and by the end of the Second World War, comparative education had become an established academic subfield of education departments in universities around the world (Manzon, 2011).

From its inaugural course at Teachers College at Columbia University, comparative education has had strong links to teacher training (Planel, 2008), with many programmes around the world including it as an optional or elective component of their degrees. However, recent reports suggest that comparative education in initial teacher training has declined over the years in Western countries (O'Sullivan et al., 2008; Planel, 2008). In the UK, at undergraduate level, comparative education can be found in general education programmes such as the BA (Hons) Education Studies and may come under a variety of titles such as comparative pedagogy, educational systems abroad, Education in Europe, and so forth. Very often, elements of comparative education may be found in other courses on global citizenship, philosophy of education or in modules with titles incorporating the terms global or international. Most full degrees in Comparative Education are offered at Master's level rather than undergraduate level and the number of institutions offering this worldwide is small in comparison to other Master's degrees, such as those in Business Administration.

Most scholars would probably now agree that comparative education is a subfield of Education Studies. Even Bereday (1964, p. ix) writes: 'Comparative education is a young subfield in the very old discipline of pedagogy.' Others, such as Phillips and Schweisfurth (2008), have argued that comparative education is a 'quasi-discipline'. They believe that:

Comparativists cover a huge range of topics which demand expertise in many areas of academic inquiry. What brings them together in an identifiably coherent way is the common attempt at comparison, and comparison is a method used by various disciplines rather than an activity which can conceivably be described as a discipline in itself.

(Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2008, p. 11)

Colclough (2010) contends that it is largely because of the vast range of topics within the field that comparative education is not constrained by disciplinary boundaries. Nor is it likely or desirable to be so. In fact, Crossley and Watson (2003, p. 66) believe that a major advantage of the field is its multidisciplinary approach and ‘engagement with a diversity of theoretical frameworks’.

What topics are covered in comparative education? Looking through various comparative education journals, one can easily see a variety of content. However, some topics have been popular for decades (Bray, 2003b). These include ‘issues of power and control, education for national development, importation of educational ideas, and reform of education’ (Bray, 2003b, p. 5). Theoretical themes have also dominated the literature: postmodernism, feminism, post-colonialism and, more recently, globalisation. It is precisely this variety which makes comparative education a hugely exciting field and therefore attractive to a great number of students and scholars alike.

## How can we define what comparative education is?

Halls (1990, p. 21) states that “‘comparative education’ has always been conceptually awkward to define’ and that ‘[t]he lack of a precise definition of the field of “comparative education” has continued to block its development’ (p. 26). Epstein (1992, p. 409) supports this view: “Comparative education” and “international education” are terms that are often confused...’ and that ‘[t]he confusion is sustained by the literature, which is mute on the differences between the two domains’. Some of this confusion is bound to rest in the fact that many, if not most, comparative studies transcend national boundaries and are international or global in scope. If this is the case, how can we understand what it is? In an attempt to do this, we will look at several definitions. Manzon (2011) offers one of the most comprehensive definitions of the field.

Manzon (2011, p. 215) defines comparative education as:

An interdisciplinary subfield of education studies that systematically examines the similarities and differences between educational systems in two or more national or cultural contexts, and their interactions with intra- and extra-educational environments. Its specific object is educational systems examined from a cross-cultural

(or cross-national, cross-regional) perspective through the systematic use of comparative method, for the advancement of theoretical understanding and theory building.

Epstein (1992, p. 409) defined comparative education as ‘a field of study that applies social scientific theories and methods to international issues of education’. He also believed that although related to international education, comparative education was distinct from it. International education as a separate field will be discussed in Chapter 7, but for the purpose of understanding this distinction, it needs to be defined here as well. Hayden (2006), a distinguished scholar in the field of international education, asserts that there is no simple definition of international education either. Epstein (1992, p. 409) refers to international education as ‘organised efforts to bring together students, teachers, and scholars from different nations to interact and learn about and from each other’. For the purpose of this book, Halls’ (1990) definition below will be used. He, in fact, created a typology (system or classification) of comparative education that has been accepted by some academics (see Philips & Schweisfurth, 2008) in helping to make sense of such a vast field. In this model (see Figure 1.1), Halls acknowledges that it is flawed as the categories are not mutually exclusive and overlap.

What is more, there is no universal agreement among comparative educationalists as to the usage of these terms. For example, many scholars would argue whether international education is a subfield of comparative education. Nevertheless, Halls defined ‘Comparative pedagogy as the

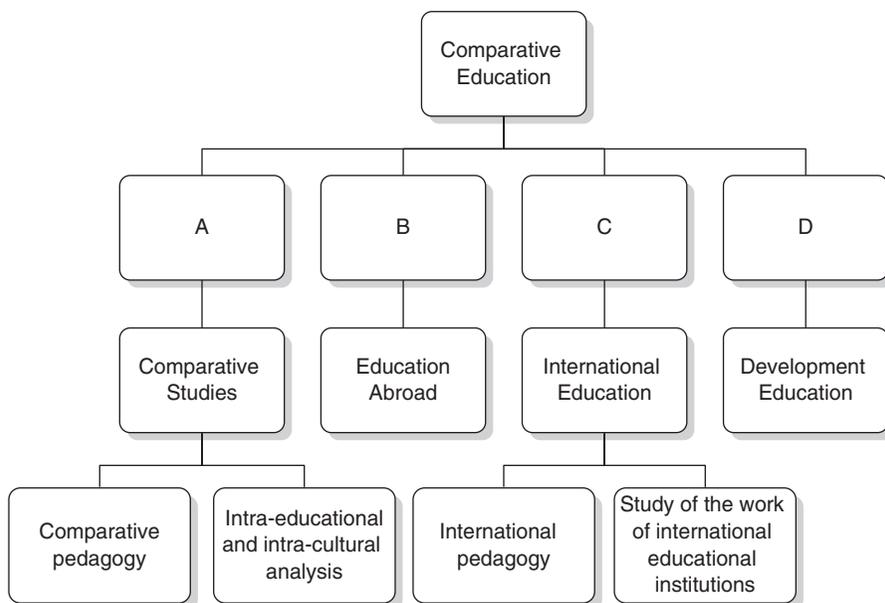


Figure 1.1 Halls’ typology of comparative education (Halls, 1990, p. 23)

study of teaching and the classroom process in different countries'. 'Intra-educational and intra-cultural analysis investigates education by its various levels, and also systematically researches the historical, social, cultural, political, religious, economic and philosophical forces that partly determine and are partly determined by the character of the education systems, and compares the resultant outcomes in two or more systems, areas or even globally.' 'Education abroad is the study of aspects of an educational systems or systems other than one's own; this includes area studies'.

Halls subdivides international education into 'international pedagogy' and 'Study of the work of international educational institutions'. 'International pedagogy is the study of teaching multinational, multicultural and multiracial groups, for example in international schools, transnational schools (such as those of the European community), or the education of linguistic or ethnic minorities'. 'It is also the study of such subjects as education for international understanding, peace education, international population and ecological studies'. Within this area, Halls also includes the resolution of intra-national differences regarding the teaching of controversial subject-matter, efforts to 'objectivise' textbooks, the harmonisation of curricula and the establishment of international teaching norms. 'Study of the work of international education institutions is concerned with policy matters, such as the establishment of international acceptability of qualifications, the promotion of educational exchanges and the initiation of cultural agreements.' 'Development education is the production of information and plans to assist policymakers, particularly in "new nations", the development of appropriate educational methods and techniques, and the training of personnel to implement programmes.'



### Activity 1.7 Categorising the field

Using Halls (1990) typology, look through various journals such as *Compare*, *Comparative Education Review* and *Comparative Education Research*. Scan the titles of the articles and abstracts. Can you classify the type of article according to Halls' model? Do studies fit neatly into the categories?

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, comparative and international are often used interchangeably with education, which has led to much discussion surrounding their use (see Epstein, 1992; Bray, 2010; Little, 2010). Bray (2010, p. 722) proposes that the field of comparative education would be strengthened by a definition which describes 'what is and is not within the bounds of comparative education, international education, and comparative and international education'. Indeed, for the student new to comparative and international education this would be useful in helping to build a conceptual framework of the field and also to help make sense of the vast amount of literature. Little (2010) concurs with Bray that the meanings of terms such as

'education', 'comparative', 'international' and 'development', for example, are used and combined differently by various scholars. Again, there is no agreement on their usage and for the student; this can be confusing. However, as no suitable alternatives exist, the terms as described by Halls will underpin this book and provide the basis for both its structure and format.



### Activity 1.8 Defining comparative education

Find other definitions in either books, journal articles or on the internet. Compare and contrast these to the definitions previously discussed. Can you then synthesise (combine) them to produce one that demonstrates your own understanding of what comparative education is? Be prepared to justify it.

## What is the purpose of comparative education and who compares?

Comparative studies in education are undertaken for a variety of reasons and by a variety of people and organisations. Some of the reasons are listed below. However, the list is not exhaustive and there is overlap, as well as one reason possibly being the result of another.

- To learn about our own education system and that of others
- To enhance our knowledge of education in general
- To improve educational institutions; their content, processes and methods
- To understand the relationship between education and society
- To promote international understanding
- To find possible solutions to educational issues



### Activity 1.9 Purpose of comparative education

Using the same articles from Activity 1.7, can you identify the nature and purpose of the comparative studies being published? Who is conducting the study? Why?

The first and foremost purpose of comparative education is in the name – to compare education in one or more countries. Traditionally, this has involved examining national education systems as the focus of study. It is now widely accepted that comparative education can

include intra-national comparisons or, in other words, comparing within countries, perhaps different states, provinces or regions. Bereday (1964, p. 5) believed that 'Comparative education seeks to make sense out of the similarities and differences among educational systems'. Looking at the reasons behind these enables us to learn about not only others but ourselves as well. Nevertheless, Bereday believed that the foremost justification for comparative education was intellectual. 'Knowledge for its own sake is the sole ground upon which comparative education needs to make a stand in order to merit inclusion among other academic fields' (Bereday, 1964, p. 5). Having said this, he was also a firm believer in the practical application of comparative education and its contribution to teaching and the social sciences in general.

There are a number of reasons why you as a student may wish to study comparative education. Perhaps you intend to teach abroad and therefore can benefit from the insights gleaned from exploring other educational systems. Comparisons enable us to view education from alternative perspectives, potentially leading to a greater understanding of the world, the people who live in it, and the issues they may face. This can also help prepare you for teaching in a multicultural context either at home or abroad. Planel (2008, p. 386) argues that comparative education and, in particular, comparative pedagogy, 'could give teachers a better understanding of how pupils' learning is affected by cultural understandings'. In an age of global migration, schools have become increasingly multicultural, so an understanding and appreciation of this diversity is crucial in the twenty-first-century classroom. Lastly, the subject itself is 'eye-opening' and interesting, particularly if you have grown up a monocultural environment.



### Activity 1.10 Benefits and challenges to studying comparative education

Can you think of any other benefits that students might gain from studying comparative education? Are there any limitations? Why or why not?

What are the challenges to making comparisons? How can you overcome these?

Much of the literature in the field has been written by academics for other academics and policy makers rather than for a student audience. 'Academics undertake comparisons in order to improve understanding both of the forces which shape education systems and processes in different settings, and of the impact of education systems and process on social and other development' (Bray, 2007, p. 16). There is also intrinsic value in knowing about education outside our own borders. For centuries, scholars have been internationally mobile in their academic pursuits

(see Kim, 2009). Many have travelled abroad out of sheer intellectual curiosity, such as those in the early ‘traveller tales’.

As previously stated, many international organisations undertake comparative studies in education (which is further discussed in Chapter 2). The main ones include UNESCO, the World Bank and the OECD. The aim of many of these organisations is to reduce educational inequalities by expanding access for all and improving the overall quality of education for the betterment of both individuals and society. These organisations often undertake education research and produce factual data through the use of quantitative methods. Statistics and other information are published on their websites, making data readily available for comparisons between two or more countries.

Policy makers and education planners are interested in comparative education for a number of reasons. ‘Governments are paying increasing attention to international comparisons as they search for effective policies that enhance individuals’ social and economic prospects, provide incentives for greater efficiency in schooling, and help to mobilise resources to meet rising demands’ (OECD, 2007, p. 3). Market forces and the marketisation of education have demanded more cost-effective and efficient ways of delivering education provision. Governments are also under pressure to improve the quality of education provision, particularly in response to international league tables such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) (to be discussed in Chapter 2). In their quest for improvement, policy makers may attempt to ‘borrow’ educational models or learn important lessons from elsewhere (see Case Study 1). Bereday (1964, p. 6) believed a major goal of comparative education was ‘first, to deduce from the achievements and the mistakes of school systems other than their own, lessons for their own schools (or to warn policy makers that such lessons cannot be light-heartedly sought where valid comparison is impossible); and second, to appraise educational issues from a global rather than an ethnocentric perspective, or in other words, to be aware always of other nations’ points of view’.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Bereday (1964, p. 5) also believed that ‘knowing about other nations is now not only a matter of curiosity but of necessity’. This statement is as valid today as it was over 40 years ago. Rapid advances in technology, communication, travel and so forth have led to the increased interconnectedness of the world. This interconnectedness has resulted in the ‘globalisation’ of nearly all aspects of society. While Bereday was perhaps referring to peace in the wake of two world wars, it can be argued that knowing about other nations has now become necessary as a result of globalisation (the relationship between globalisation and education will be further explored in Chapter 8). In fact, many scholars believe that comparative and international research in education is being ‘revitalised’ as a result of globalisation (Crossley & Watson, 2003).

## What are the challenges of studying comparative education?

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Challenges of methodology aside, perhaps, potentially one of the greatest barriers for comparativists is that we all hold values and beliefs about the nature of purpose of education which are inextricably linked to our own experiences. As Bereday previously pointed out, there is a danger of adopting an 'ethnocentric' approach when making comparisons. Schultz and Lavenda (2011) define ethnocentrism as 'The opinion that one's own way of life is natural or correct and, indeed, the only true way of being fully human'. When making comparisons, we have to be aware that we do not impose our own values and beliefs on others, particularly if we think our own way of doing something is 'best'. This can lead to bias and even prejudice if we are not careful.

Another challenge stems from the data used in comparative education (discussed in Chapter 2) and the need to critically appraise not only how it was arrived at, but the source of it as well. We need to check our sources carefully to make sure they are reliable, accurate and that there is no hidden agenda. For example, newspapers may over-exaggerate international league table results and report on them inaccurately, so there is a 'story' to sell. Sometimes, statistics are presented by governments in such a way so that they are seen in the best possible light (Clarkson, 2009). This may be particularly true around election time when governments try to demonstrate that improvements to education have been made.

And, more importantly, are we comparing the same things? When we talk about courses, for instance, do we mean modules or programmes? Is the first grade (USA) the same thing as year one in the UK? In other words, are we comparing like for like? We also need to carefully consider the 'thing' we are analysing – education. Education does not mean the same thing to everyone. As Grant (2000, p. 310) points out, '[i]t may have quite different aims, operate under different conditions, and be assessed by different criteria'. Are comparisons fair if we are not looking at the same thing?

As previously mentioned, 'borrowing' educational best practice from other countries is common in comparative education. Many examples of borrowing can be found in the UK and elsewhere. In the UK, one such example was the abolition of the tripartite system of education, where children were segregated by ability into grammar, secondary modern or technical schools in the 1960s, which was replaced with a comprehensive system of schooling based on the American High School model (Clarkson, 2009). However, the transference of ideas from one context to another is a highly complex affair (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2008). Education planners cannot simply transpose one set of ideas on another without taking into consideration the social, cultural, historical, and even economic factors involved. Historically,

there are many examples worldwide (both successful and unsuccessful) where comparative studies in education have played a significant role in influencing policy (see Case Study 1).

## Conclusion

Comparative education has successfully emerged in the twenty-first century as a multidisciplinary field of study with a strong scholarly base. There have been a number of individuals and organisations throughout history (too many to name in such a short chapter), which have contributed greatly to its establishment and academic advancement. The interest in, and indeed the importance of, comparative education can be seen in the worldwide growth of societies, organisations, academic journals, specialist courses and even postgraduate degrees in the subject.

There are many students, academics, policy makers and practitioners engaged with comparative education for a variety of reasons worldwide. Whatever the purpose, the field has contributed, and will continue to contribute, greatly to our understanding of education – both of others and that of our own.



### Case Study 1 Educational 'borrowing' in China, 1949–1966

Throughout the centuries, and at different points in time, China, like many nations, has looked elsewhere for answers to educational dilemmas. The search for Western knowledge can be traced back to the sixteenth century and the Italian Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (Lee & Mak, 2010). Although Ricci went to China with the aim of spreading Christianity, he also played a key role in spreading European scientific knowledge, particularly in mathematics and astronomy. In later years, China looked to the former Soviet Union for educational reforms. From 1949 to the mid-1950s, the dominant slogan in China was 'learn from the Soviet Union', and over 10,000 Soviet experts went to China to help set up a Soviet model of education (Pepper, 1996, p. 158). The Soviet model was incorporated at all levels from primary schooling through to higher education, and Soviet thinking continued to directly influence policy until the early 1960s (see Tsang, 2000). During this time universal primary schooling was introduced as well as efforts to reduce illiteracy rates. As a result, over 100 million Chinese between the ages of 14 and 45 became literate from 1949 to 1966 (Arnové,

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

1984). Furthermore, massive expansion in schooling led to increased enrolment rates. In 1949, only about 20% of young people were attending school, but by 1980 90% of school-age children were enrolled (Arnove, 1984).

Changes in higher education 'Soviet style' were also made as the Chinese government looked to reform it. Soviet academic material was translated and used as the primary source of the curriculum. Central planning was a key component of Soviet-style management, which led to an emphasis on uniformity, standardisation and the adoption of the exact same course syllabus and teaching plans in institutions across China. By mid-1954, curriculum revision for over 170 academic specialisms was complete and their use enforced (Pepper, 1996). In the 'Great Leap Forward', the number of higher education institutions increased from 229 in 1957 to 1,289 in 1960, and within this same three-year period, total enrolment also increased from 441,181 to 961,623 (Yu et al., 2012). The increase in the number of students along with the mechanical copying of Soviet-style education is attributed to the decrease in the quality of higher education during this time.

*Key questions:*

- Why did China look to the Soviet Union for ideas?
- Why do you think there was a push to educate the masses during this time?
- Were there any benefits to copying Soviet-style education?
- What challenges do you think the Chinese government faced?
- What role does comparative education play in helping governments to reform educational policy?
- Can you find other examples of educational 'borrowing', successful or otherwise? Why are they successful or not?

### Suggested reading

Bereday, G. (1964) *Comparative Method in Education*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston

A classic text which has been hugely important in the methodological debates of comparative education.

Kandel, I. (1933) *Studies in Comparative Education*. London: George Harrap & Co  
A seminal text in the field of comparative education and a must read, particularly for those studying at Master's level.

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## CHAPTER 2

# HOW ARE COMPARISONS MADE?

This chapter explores:

- Secondary sources in comparative education;
- The statistical use of data in educational comparisons;
- Databases on national systems of education;
- The use of international surveys on student achievement.



Many students studying comparative education will not have the opportunity to conduct primary research in another country. Primary research is original research where you collect raw data through a number of research methods, such as observation, experiment or interview. Collecting your own data, and especially in another country, is not only time-consuming but also very expensive. Therefore, in order to make comparisons, you may have to use a range of secondary sources. Secondary sources can include policy documents, curriculum frameworks and educational statistics. The internet has played a key role in making this kind of educational data widely available. Educational data is collected by a number of organisations and for a variety of purposes. Particularly in comparative education, the use of statistics has played a