

The Curtain-raised to Comparative Education, Professionalization and Policy Transfer

*Gelan Hesham Abdou Ahmed Mahmoud

Corresponding Author: Gelan Hesham Abdou Ahmed Mahmoud

Date of Submission: 07-09-2017

Date of acceptance: 23-09-2017

I. INTRODUCTION

Religion, ethnicity, governance, culture, and politics drastically impinge education systems (Dede & Baskan, 2011). According to Dede and Baskan, “a country’s education system cannot be described as being in a coincidental relationship with its own society” (p. 3536). Consequently, education systems, as stated by Dede and Baskan, mirror “the characteristics of the society in which they exist and reflect that society’s values” (p. 3536). Such characteristics, if vigorously administered, will unveil the steps towards an effective education system. Therefore, comparative and international education is a pivotal field in constructing flawless education systems and in unlocking educational dilemmas. To begin with, Crossley and Watson (2009) defined comparative education as an in-depth interest in “explaining why educational systems and processes vary and how education relates to wider social factors and forces” (p. 635). Also, they deemed international education as “the findings derived from comparative education to understand better the educational processes they examine and thus to enhance the ability to make policy relating to programs such as those associated with international exchange” (p. 635). Thus, both acknowledged that comparative and international education are two sides of the same coin. These definitions clearly imply the various missions of comparative and international education. These missions entail scrutinizing education systems in various countries, examining educational issues, proposing solutions to complex problems, discovering numerous cultures and values, evaluating educational practices, reforming education systems, and comprehending the needs of different education systems (Crossley & Watson, 2009; Dede & Baskan, 2011). Thus, this paper sheds the light on the origin of comparative education to epitomize its relationship with the evolution of professionalization and policy transfer. The first section discusses the five stages which led to the emanation of comparative education field. The second section demonstrates the relationship between the roots of comparative education and the professionalization of the field. The third section highlights the interrelationship between the efflux of comparative education and policy transfer. Finally, the aim of this paper is to better elucidate the correlation between the wellspring of comparative education and the chrysalis of professionalization and policy transfer.

The birth of comparative education

First of all, there are five climactic stages, contributing to the rise of comparative education field. The first stage, entitled travelers’ tales, was the pillar of comparative education field; scholars mainly initiated flying to foreign countries in order to “record the educational practices and habits in those places” and “[bring] back tales of what they had observed” (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2007, p. 29; Dede & Baskan, 2011, p. 3538). In the early 19th century, the Napoleonic Wars in Europe suspended travel opportunities; however, after these wars were gridlocked, scholars recapitulated flying to other countries to “report in detail on what they observed” (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2007, p. 27). One of these travelers was John Quincy Adams who toured Silesia and inspected “the training of teachers and various other details of educational provision” (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2007, p. 30). In addition to Adams, Phillips and Schweisfurth regarded Marc-Antoine Jullien as the father of comparative education who contributed to the field by maturing a questionnaire to disentangle the process of comparing various education systems across the globe. Furthermore, the second stage accommodated scholars with guidelines on what to be learnt and borrowed from foreign systems. For instance, Fanny Trollope was one of the most intelligent travelers who drew a comparison between the education systems in England and France to spot the best educational practices. Nevertheless, the third stage was mainly centered on collecting data. Phillips and Schweisfurth highlighted the fact that Victor Cousin as well as Horace Mann “produced influential texts based on thorough knowledge of what was happening in education in Germany and elsewhere” (p. 36). Last but not least, the fourth stage was termed “socio-economic evidence and understanding” which encompassed the scrutinization of the national character using history as a starting point (p. 37). History, as elaborated by Phillips and Schweisfurth, empowered scholars to identify the elements “which had contributed to

education systems being as they were[and] which helped with understanding the socio-economic dimensions of education” (p. 37). Finally, the fifth stage focused on data analysis not only to provide interpretations for educational phenomena but also to enhance educational performances. Data, propagated by the OECD and IEA, capacitated researchers to portray disparate education systems and to identify the best educational practices. Finally, these five stages have tremendously subsidized to the flowering of comparative education field worldwide.

The professionalization of comparative education

Second of all, almost all scholars in the third stage produced influential texts which highly enriched the comparative education field. By publishing books, scholars unconsciously constituted a knowledge base, which is one of the crucial steps towards the professionalization process. However, a heating debate erupted in regards to the professional status of the comparative and international education field (Wiseman & Matherly, 2009). Wiseman and Matherly surmise that researchers as well as educators “are still struggling to distinguish themselves as belonging to a unique profession” (p. 334). For the comparative and international education field to be fully professionalized, it must consort to certain agreed-upon guidelines. Hall (1968) declared three guidelines which are indispensable for the professionalization of a given field. These guidelines incorporated the enactment of a knowledge base, the affiliation of members to universities, and the inauguration of professional associations. First of all, Wilensky (1964) argued that a knowledge base can be founded through the combination of theoretical and practical knowledge. Merging comparative education with international education represented a “systematic body of knowledge which is both theoretical and practical” (Wiseman & Matherly, 2009, p. 336). Moreover, Wilensky (1964) classified knowledge base into explicit knowledge, which can be located in books, lectures, and conferences and implicit knowledge, which is acquired through observations. He asserted that if a profession is “based on knowledge or doctrine which is too general and vague, on the one hand, or too narrow and specific, on the other, it is not likely to achieve the exclusive jurisdiction necessary to professional authority” (p. 150). Nevertheless, Wiseman and Matherly (2009) alleged that universities, offering degrees in comparative and international education, is a clear-cut proof that this field has its own knowledge base. Furthermore, they scrutinized the syllabuses, utilized to unravel comparative and international education in various universities to further support the fact that the field has a common knowledge base. After inspecting the curricula in 30 universities, Wiseman and Matherly disclosed that “four [topics] were explicitly taught in more than 5% of the courses: culture (6.17%), gender (6.79%), theory (8.64%), and development (9.88%). Systems, research, and globalization were the next most frequently taught topics, weighing in at just under 5% (4.94%)” (p. 347). Accordingly, these figures explicate that there is a common knowledge base in comparative and international education field. Second of all, Hall (1968) revealed that when members affiliated themselves to universities as well as organizations, they were proffering to the professionalization of the field. Utilizing an online membership tool, Wiseman and Matherly (2009) investigated the institutional affiliation of scholars. Accordingly, they unveiled the fact that 84% of CIES members were affiliated to universities, 14% were associated with organizations, and 2% were related to different areas in the education system. Moreover, Arnove (2002) spotlighted the fact that CIES membership is blossoming. This is due to the escalation of “student membership by 61–53 percent overall for U.S. students, and 120 percent for international students! 60 I believe these are very positive signs for the continued vitality of our society” (p. 493). These numerical values clearly divulge that the majority of CIES members have affiliated themselves to either universities or organizations. Third of all, the formation of associations is part and parcel of the professionalization process of the comparative and international education field. Wiseman and Matherly announced some of the well-known associations, like the Comparative Education Society in Europe (CESE), and the British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE). In addition, journals, like *Comparative Education Review*, *the International Review of Education*, and *the International Journal of Educational development* were ensconced. Thus, the foundation of a common knowledge base, the affiliation of scholars to universities and organizations, and the erection of journals and associations are momentous steps towards the professionalization of any field.

International actors and policy transfer

Third of all, the transfer of policies, ideas, practices, and systems from one country to another, which was one of the primary concerns of travelers in the second stage, is revitalized through globalization. Transferring policies and ideas from one place to another is processed by actors, like international agencies, universities, and corporates. Although there is a viable interest in policy transfer worldwide, Sadler was extremely vigilant about this process; he (as cited in Beech, 2009) believed that if a flower was “pick[ed] 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” (p. 341). What Sadler intended to endorse was that policy transfer triggers several issues. One of these issues is the inappropriateness of some policies which were transferred from

one context to another by various service providers (Bridges, 2014). For instance, the Integrated English Language Program (IELP), which was financially supported by the USAID in 1997, sought not only to upgrade English Language teaching but also to boost technology in classrooms (Ibrahim, 2010). Ibrahim posited that “Computers to be used in English language teaching, model computer laboratories, and interactive video-conferencing” were the three radical components of the IELP (p. 509). However, public schools were not equipped with such technological gadgets. Therefore, Egyptian teachers fled all the way to the US to be instructed on the know-how of computers. Most of the money, donated by the USAID, was emaciated on teacher training in the US. Ibrahim stated that “by taking teachers outside of their local environment and training them in institutions with very different levels and uses of technology than they were used to” (p. 509), the US clashed with one of the most imperative in-service training elements which stipulated that teacher training should be close to their workplace. Unfortunately, Egyptian teachers “complained strongly that what they learned was of little relevance to their needs” (p. 509). This example illustrates the pragmatism of international agencies which “blinds them from seeing on what kind of assumptions, familiar notions, of established and unexamined ways of thinking their practices are based” (Beech, 2009, p. 351). Another issue with policy transfer is the eradication of existing cultures. For instance, some of the educational programs, which were executed in the Gulf States, acted as “cultural replacement” (Bridges, 2014, p. 86). Another striking example, provided by Bridges, is when Kazakhstan solicited the aid of Cambridge Assessment, one of the most prominent assessment bodies, to introduce “new curriculum and assessment for Kazakhstan, new teacher training, and the implementation of a trilingual policy” (p. 91). Bridges affirmed that no matter the efforts exerted by Kazakhstan in adding a “local flavor” to its curriculum, the syllabuses will give impulse to the Western culture and belittle the current one (p. 92). These are clear-cut examples that policy borrowing leads to the marginalization and negligence of cultures. Last but not least, borrowing policies from international actors, as stated by Bridges, “comes with strings attached” (p. 89). When requisitioning aid, recipient countries are obliged to meet certain conditions which are imposed by donor states. He deduced that such stipulations can be “promoting a particular religion, adopting a democratic regime, making progress in human rights, providing accounts of expenditure, [and] accessing donor countries to raw materials” (p. 89). In fact, Bridges noted that international actors exploit “their wealth to achieve changes that they see to be desirable for the recipient country” (89). However, Bridges stressed the fact that there are donors who offer aid to recipient countries without imposing any requirements. This was the case in Ethiopia when it requested the UK Department for International Development (DFID) to thrive its educational strategies. Clare Short, the UK Minister, attempted to coax the parliament to invest in Ethiopia’s educational strategies at a time when Ethiopia was engaged in a war with Eritrea. Members of the UK parliament were reluctant to provide Ethiopia with the necessary funds lest it would be used in weapons purchase. To conclude, policies and practices, which are transferred via service providers, trigger unfathomable dilemmas to recipient countries.

In conclusion, the origin of comparative education procreated the processes of professionalization, and policy transfer. To begin with, there are five stages which paved the way for the development of comparative education field. In the first stage, travelers targeted foreign countries to juxtapose disparate educational practices. The second stage revolved around policy borrowing from foreign contexts. Furthermore, scholars in the third stage collected data after comparing and contrasting various education systems. History was a key theme in the fourth stage; it was resorted to by scholars to further illustrate the divergent nature of education systems. Last, the fifth stage hinged on scrutinizing the data, collected by the OECD and the IEA, to pinpoint the best educational practices. Nevertheless, a knowledge base, one of the critical factors in the professionalization process, was erected when scholars produced influential texts during the third stage. A knowledge base was shaped when universities, offering degrees in comparative and international education, were cohesively employing the same topics and syllabuses. Furthermore, another factor contributing to the establishment of a knowledge base is merging the theoretical frameworks of comparative education with the practical ground works of international education. Finally, policy transfer, a central motif in the second stage, is handled by international actors, such as international agencies, universities, and corporates. The pragmatism of such service providers caused recipient countries to be languished by the inappropriate and the unethical transfer of policies. Thus, Steiner and Stolpe (as cited in Bridges, 2014) deduced that countries, adopting policies from actors, must be “active agents in what they selectively borrow and how they modify what they have borrowed” (p. 94).

REFERENCES

- [1] Arnove, R. (2002). Comparative and international education society facing the twenty-first century: Challenges and contributions. *Comparative Education Review*, 45(4), 477-503.
- [2] Beech, J. (2009). Who is strolling through the global garden? International agencies and educational transfer. In R. Cowen & A. M. Kazamias (Eds.), *International handbook of comparative education* (pp. 341-357). New York: Springer.

- [3] Bridges, D. (2014). The ethics and politics of the international transfer of educational policy and practice. *Ethics and Education*, 9(1), 84-96.
- [4] Crossley, M. & Watson, K. (2009). Comparative and international education: Policy transfer, context sensitivity and professional development. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(5), 633-649.
- [5] Dede, S. & Baskan, G. (2011). Theoretical basis of comparative education and suggestion of a model: Comparative education council in Turkish education system. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 15(2011), 3536-3542.
- [6] Hall, H. R. (1968). Professionalization and bureaucratization. *American Sociological Review*, 33(1), 92-104.
- [7] Ibrahim, S. A. (2010). The politics of educational transfer and policymaking in Egypt. *Prospects Journal*, 40, 499- 515.
- [8] Phillips, D. & Schweisfurth, M. (2007). How comparative education has developed. In comparative and international education: An introduction to theory, method and practice (pp. 27 – 41). London, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- [9] Wilensky, H. (1964). The professionalization of everyone. *American Journal of Sociology*, 70(2), 137-158.
- [10] Wiseman, A. & Matherly, C. (2009). The professionalization of comparative education and international education: Promises and problems. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 4(4), 334-355.

*Gelan Hesham Abdou Ahmed Mahmoud. "The Curtain-Raiser to Comparative Education, Professionalization and Policy Transfer." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, vol. 22, no. 09, 2017, pp. 80–83.