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Comparing Values: Revisiting Methods and Approaches in Comparative Education

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Abstract

The field of comparative education experienced a peak of development in the first half of the 20th century, attracting significant attention from educationalists, researchers and policymakers. Major figures in the field such as Kandel, Bereday, King and Holmes were particularly known for their contributions to methodological discussions. The peak period was characterised by attempts to identify methodologies unique to comparative studies, and develop an academic identity in educational studies. With the growth of comparative elements in almost every aspect of educational studies, perhaps as a part of globalising trend, the relative significance of comparative education has been reduced, and the academic identity of comparative education has also been challenged. However, the new academic scenario has given rise to the significance of comparative education in a new format. While there may not be distinctive academics being regarded as “comparativists” comparable to Bereday and Kandel, with rise of international projects covering a wide spectrum of education, the number of comparativists has actually grown. All international projects have to make decisions on fundamental research questions, and whenever more than one country or education system is involved, questions related to what and how to compare arise. Indeed, the last few decades have witnessed a very rich discussion on comparative methodologies which may or may not refer to the conventional literature of comparative education, but they all have to arrive at certain parameters for the comparability of their studies. The growing significance of qualitative studies have also challenged and enriched the field of comparative education, as unlike conventional comparative studies which focused on the comparable, the rise of qualitative studies brings about the question of how to compare the non-comparable. This paper attempts to review recent discussions on comparative methodologies and approaches, using values studies as a context of discussion. There are two main reasons for choosing values studies as a context of discussion. First, this is an area in which the author has been involved for more than ten years. Second, this area always involves the development of scales and instruments which aim to compare the comparables and also qualitative studies which require the comparison of non-comparables.