

Part 1

Comparative Education & History of Education

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Economics and Comparative and International Education: Past, Present, Future

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to map this place of economics in the field of study of Comparative and International Education. Interrelationship between economy and education is concerned, two broad lines of enquiry lie within the scope of Comparative and International Education: economy as shaping force of education systems and the effect of education on the economy. In the interwar “factors and forces” stage of Comparative Education, the economy as a shaping force of national education systems came to the fore. In the social science phase of the 1960s the focus shifted to a study of the effect of education on the economy. This was reversed again in the 1970s, when socio-economic reproduction theories assigned a deterministic place to socio-economic stratification of society. In recent years neo-liberal economics dictated the research agenda of Comparative Education. In conclusion recommendations for a future research agenda in the field are made.

Keywords: Comparative and International Education, human capital theory, knowledge economy, neo-liberal economics, socio-economic reproduction

Introduction

The saying “money makes the world go around” is even more true than ever in an age of neo-liberal economics in a globalized world. Therefore scholars of the field of Comparative and International Education should also be mindful of the place of economics within this field of scholarly endeavor. The aim of this paper is to map this place of economics in the field of study of Comparative and International Education. The paper commences with the clarification of the concept of Comparative and International Education and from there identify the two major lines of investigation of economics as these are the concern of comparativists. Then the study of economics in the various phases in the historical evolution of Comparative and International Education is surveyed and assessed. In conclusion, guidelines for the future unfolding of these lines of investigation in the field are made.

Economics and Comparative and International Education: Scope

Comparative and International Education can be defined as a three in one perspective on education, namely:

- An education system perspective
- A contextual perspective
- A comparative perspective (Wolhuter, 2015, pp. 24-26).

Firstly then Comparative Education focuses on the education *system*. The focus of Comparative Education is broader than just the education system *per se*. The education system is studied within its societal context, and is regarded as being shaped by, or as being the outcome of societal forces (geographic, demographic, social, economic, cultural, political and religious) and also, in turn as education shaping society. Finally, Comparative Education does not contend with studying one education system in its societal context in isolation. Various education systems, shaped by their societal contexts, are compared; hence the comparative perspective.

In view of trends in both the worlds of scholarship and in education, there is in recent times a belief that the name of the field should change to Comparative and International Education. The term International Education has a long history and has taken on many meanings. However, here International Education is used as referring to scholarship studying education through a lens bringing an international perspective. With the scholarly field of Comparative Education then evolving into Comparative and International Education, the idea is that single/limited area studies and comparisons then eventually feed the all-encompassing, global study of the international education project.

From the above it can be deduced that as far the interrelationship between economy and education is concerned, two broad lines of enquiry lie within the scope of Comparative and International Education:

- Economy as shaping force of education systems
- The effect of education on the economy.

The interwar “factors and forces” stage of Comparative and International Education

During the very early phases in the historical evolution of Comparative Education, that of travellers’ tales (since time immemorial), the systematic study of foreign education for borrowing (since the beginning of the nineteenth century) and the phase of international cooperation (since 1925) education-economics interrelations escaped the attention of comparativists (*cf.* Wolhuter, 2017). During the ensuing “factors and forces” phase – which reach its zenith in the decades between the two world wars – (national) education systems came to be seen as the outcome of societal forces (geography, demography, social system, economy, politics and religious and life and world view) and eminent scholars in the field at the time, such as Isaac Kandel, Nicholas Hans, Friedrich Schneider, and later Vernon Mallinson, Arthur Moehlman, Phil Idenburg and others, all designed elaborated schemes enumerating and ordering these set of contextual forces. Scholars in the field thus turned to the economy as a shaping force of (national) education systems. Aspects of the economy that were regarded as having an impact on education include:

- The level of economic development, and
- The structure of economic activities.

The level of economic development in a country, or the degree of affluence of a community, determines the amount of funding for schools, for teachers, and for other educational facilities and expenditures.

The proportion of a country's workforce engaged in various economic activities (primary activities such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and mining, secondary economic activities, i.e. manufacturing and the tertiary or service sector) will have a bearing on the education system, particularly in so far as an education system prepares learners for their future careers.

The 1960s: Social science phase of Comparative and International Education

The 1960s saw a strong movement of turning Comparative Education into a fully-fledged social science, and a positivistic social science at that. During this time there was a euphoric belief in the societal ameliorative power of education: education came to be seen as a wonder cure for every societal ill. For example, if a societal ill such as drug abuse was identified, the obvious solution was believed to supply "anti-drug education". Concerning the interrelationship between economics and education the direction of investigation reversed from what it was in the "factors and forces" era. Now the effect of education on the economy became the focus of attention, e.g. the effect of education on economic growth or the effect of education on the eradication of unemployment. Human Capital Theory came in the vogue. Theodore Schultz's Theory of Human Capital portrayed education as a factor in the production factor, upon a par with – in fact carrying bigger weight than – other production factors such as (monetary) capital, machinery, land and labour.

Two major lines of investigation were firstly macro-level studies, calculating correlations between development of national education systems and level of economic affluence of nations. The proto-type of these studies was surely that of Harbison and Myers (1964). The second line was rates of return analysis on investment in education (*cf.* Lozano, 2011).

The 1970s: Pessimism and heterodoxy

The education expansion drive which gained, in all seriousness momentum since the 1960s did not produce the predicted societal benefits. For example, instead of eradicating unemployment, the spectre of schooled unemployment raised its head, especially after the worldwide economic slowdown which set in after the first oil crisis in 1973. The 1970s was a decade of increasing pessimism amongst comparativists, as to the societal dividends of education. Rival paradigms to modernisation theory and structural-functionalism set in, particularly reproduction theories.

Theories of socio-economic reproduction, of which Bowles and Gintis' (1976) publication is widely regarded as the trailblazer, view education as serving to reinforce socio-economic stratifications. Children of upper and middle class families attend well-endowed schools offering high quality education, equipping these children for well-paid and prestigious careers. On the other hand schools attended by children from poor families are less well-endowed and offer a poor quality education, thus dooming these children towards entrance to low held jobs. World

system analysis (*cf.* Arnove, 1982) projected this thesis on a world-wide canvass: dominance of Northern Hemispheric education models and epistemological paradigms keeps the Global South subdued and in a state of perpetual underdevelopment.

Hence the direction of investigation reversed once again one hundred and eighty degrees: no longer the effect of education on the economy was the focus of interest, but the effect of economic forces (economic inequality in particular) on education.

The 1990s: Heterogeneity. A more nuanced view

By the early 1990s protagonists of various paradigms no longer spent all their energy criticising each other, but, in the time spirit of Postmodernism, a tolerance, even an appreciation of different paradigms developed in Comparative Education (Rust, 1996, p. 32). Postmodernism rejects the notion of one perspective/paradigm containing the entire truth, but advocates an awareness and acknowledgement of a multiplicity of knowledge perspectives. This phase also saw a proliferation of the number of paradigms emerging in Comparative Education.

The oscillating deterministic frameworks of the previous two phases made way for more nuanced views on the interrelationships between education and society (*cf.* Stromqvist, 2005). Education was no longer seen as a wonder cure to all societal ills nor as being held captive by power relations in society. For example, Gladwell (2013, pp. 63-96) recently demonstrated statistically that poor schooling is no absolute determinant of academic achievement of students.

The current age of globalization and the neo-liberal economic revolution

Two forceful contemporary societal trends impacting on the interrelationship between education and economics; and the scholarly study thereof, are that of globalization and the neo-liberal economic revolution. Halls (1991, as cited by Pang, 2013, p. 18) defines globalization as "... the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa". The neo-liberal economic revolution entails the retraction of the role of the state in the economy and even in the provision of social services; and giving the forces of the market and private entrepreneurship freedom of reigns (*cf.* Van der Walt & Wolhuter, 2017). This revolution commenced in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Western Europe and North America, and after 1990 spread to the erstwhile East Bloc and to the countries of the Global South.

Globalization is creating what Friedman (2009) calls a "flat world", that is where whatever benefits geography (location, endowment with natural resources) may have bestowed upon a country, have been wiped out by ease of communication and transport in the modern world, and in a "flat world" competitiveness depends on quality of human resources and economic, political and social context. In a neo-liberal economy, the value of the human being is (however objectionable) reduced to a production and consumption unit, hence once again, the value of education is narrowly judged in terms of its contribution towards raising economic productivity of the educand. This revolution also carried the principles of efficiency and the

profit motive into education, and it gave rise to the rise of private education, all these with obvious implications for the Comparative Education research agenda.

The rise of the knowledge economy

A final salient contemporary trend is that of the nascent knowledge economy. In the histories of (national) economies, the following phases are distinguished. In most primitive ages or economies, a phase of hunting and gathering existed, hunting and gathering were the only economic activities. After the Agricultural Revolution, which began in the “Fertile Crescent” of the Middle East about 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, agricultural economies arose, where agriculture and/or other extractive industries, such as mining, fishing, or forestry for trade and profit, became the mainstay of the economy. Next, after the Industrial Revolution, which began in England from about 1760, industrial economies developed, where manufacturing became the basis of economies. Next, a phase of services, where services constitute the majority of economic activities, appeared in North America and Western Europe in the twentieth century. Now, in the most advanced economies, a phase of a knowledge economy is dawning, i.e. an economy where the production and consumption of new knowledge has become the driving axis of economic development. In a knowledge economy education assumes even more value as generator of economic growth and prosperity.

Future?

While the imperatives of the knowledge economy and the reality of neo-liberal economics cannot and should not be denied, the unfettered pursuit of the profit motive, and the exclusive view of a human being as a production and a consumption unit, cannot be warranted and is a reductionist, even dangerous view of the human being (*cf.* Van der Walt & Wolhuter, 2017). In this regard a few other measures, in calculating the effect of education (rather than merely rates of return analyses) could be suggested.

Gross National Happiness is one such measure, being made up of nine domains: psychological well-being, ecological diversity, community vitality, good governance, cultural diversity and resilience, education, time use, living standards and health (*cf.* Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research, 2016). Calculating intercorrelations between measures of education on the one hand, and on the other, the composite GNH value and the values of the indices of the other eight domains, may well yield interesting results.

There is also the concept of “soft power” of a country, a concept formulated by American policy specialist Joseph Nye in the 1990s. Every year the journal *Monocle* publishes a list of the 25 countries in the world with most “soft power”. The “soft power” of a country is made up of a number of factors such as how many universities in the world’s top 100 universities are in the country, the number of consulates and embassies, number of Nobel prize winners, number of asylum seekers, number of visitors to top museums, number of think tanks, number of international tourists (and the amount of money they spend), number of World Heritage Sites and number of international students (Booyens, 2016).

Then there is also Capability Theory. Capability theory is a philosophy of which the major protagonists are economist Amartya Sen and legal expert Martha Nussbaum. It is a philosophy emphasising individual emancipation in the shape of personal choice and freedom. The concept of capability in this philosophy is not the narrow understanding associated with skills such as numeracy or literacy. Capabilities are defined as the functions, opportunities and freedoms people possess to pursue goals they value and to bring about change that is meaningful to them (Steyn *et al*, 2016, p. 143).

Conclusion

While there are within the field of Comparative and International Education several themes relating to the interrelationship between education and economics; scholars in the field should guard against the narrow, reductionistic view of viewing the human being as merely a production and consumption unit. In attaching more value and in promoting a more balanced view of humans several themes could be added. Biesta (2013, p. 4) is of the view that the question “for what reason do we want an education system?” can be answered in one of three basic ways, namely to learn skills (the child or educand should learn useful skills, such as a trade), to socialise (to adapt to society and to be able to function in society) and to individualise (education should create opportunities for self-actualisation or for maximum possibilities of choices for the educand). For most people the purpose of education/schools lie in a combination of these three ideal types, with varying value attached to the relative importance of each. Comparative and International Education too can reach its maximum potential when all three are considered.

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