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Internationalization, Globalization and Relationship Networks as an Epistemological Framework Based on Comparative Studies in Education

Abstract

In this paper we present some thoughts on the epistemological framework of comparative studies in education. We present some concepts on the internationalization, globalization and inter-relation networks, based on Jürgen Schriewer, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Norbert Elias's theoretical concepts. These reflections were built within the framework of the Theory and Comparative Educational Methods seminars taught in the Master's and Doctorate programs of Educational Sciences at the Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo. It is worth mentioning, that based on such seminars, several research works have been developing, mostly post-graduate thesis.

Keywords: comparative education, global system, relational analysis, globalization

Introduction

Comparative education has evolved based on new theoretical proposals that have been developed between the late Twentieth and early Twenty-First Centuries. Some of the new approaches are based on Tenbruck and Bergersen and their criticism on Durkheim, since the new globalization surge provides a framework for the understanding of the phenomenon from the internationalization angle and for a very different action than that of earlier centuries. While it is known that in comparative education there is no consensus on their perspectives and positions, as there is in social sciences, because of the opposing ways of perceiving others; there is a constant search to continue analyzing the opposing sociocultural differences, to the extent that, today, the world has been taken as a unit of analysis, due to the degree of transnational or relational interdependence.

Based on the previous approaches, this presentation is divided into three parts: a) Internationalization, b) the origins of a comparative science in education, and, c) the Global System as a unit of analysis, where especially social relationships have become meaningful. We end our work with a brief reflection as a way of conclusion.

World system and interrelation networks

Internationalization

In text of *World System and Interrelation Networks: The Internationalization of Education and the Role of Comparative Research* (1996), Schriewer states that in the new context of internationalization there are limitations to a State's sovereignty, since there are new features that have caused this situation. For example: the global financial interconnections that impede us to act independently from the rest of the world, the international monetary crisis, the global ecological interdependence, global migrations and increased communications. This is interpreted as follows:

there are aspects that a state hands over to other states or to the international community.

In Schriewer's terms (1996), there is now an arena of global relationships of interaction and exchange, due to its global interconnection and multidimensional characteristics, which in evolutionary terms is a new phenomenon. It has implications on individuals' everyday experiences in education and training, since educational communication has been globalized. That is mainly perceived at the level of schools, universities (which are large scale organizations), and in their efforts made to enforce control, which are reflected in educational policies and planning.

The existing international interconnection in education is so strong that we speak of a "global pedagogical public". In the 1930s, Friedrich Schneider developed this perspective, by means of various indicators found in the dense activity of the educational field. In this regard, Schriewer proposes that it is the task of comparative education to reach to the level of the supranational, universalism for the "internationalization of awareness of the problems by educators and the formation of the educational theory" (Schriewer, 1996, p. 18). This initially causal trend finally arrived in the mid-1990s, mainly due to the large number of political-educational and academic events, the creation of associations, the presentation of global reports, and the academic production with international direction, which makes us realize the density of the network of international cooperation in education.

In spite of the above, it is important to distinguish that the international networking in education, which is a fact or a phenomenon that takes place in time and history is one thing, the area of international comparative education, a field of intellectual activity with its own methodology is another. Schriewer (1996) underlines this paradox. He mentions that these are two different things, the precise method of analysis for comparative education and the research field as an intellectual field in the international arena of this discipline, where the sociocultural and historical events and processes take place.

Origins of comparative science in education

Thus, with the intention of clarifying how the idea of a comparative science in education came to be, Schriewer (1996) goes back to the historical context of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and resumes Durkheim's studies. Durkheim was pivotal to the development of comparative education, since he rescued the idea of comparison as a characteristic activity of human thought, but in the field of comparative study, it is an example of the transference of a methodological approach taken from natural sciences (biological) applied to Human and Social Sciences.

Another precursor of the comparative analysis in education (and of Educational Science) is Marc-Antoine Jullien (1817) who, along with Wilhelm Von Humboldt, identified the theoretical and methodological problems of transference and mediation of a research approach, from biology to social sciences, where they indicated that its scope was extended far beyond the world of anatomy. Humboldt glimpsed into the methodological debate of comparative education, the "tangle" of methodological options that are difficult to reconcile with one another. Because of this, it can be said that from the beginning there is no consensus on what

comparative education entails since it is full of contrasts and controversies. There are two ways to analyze this, due to the opposing perspectives of perceiving one another. That is, first there are studies of causality (with cause and effect relationships) as in nature, and second, those studies which rescued humans' self-reference or historicity. The ways in which the sociocultural differences are seen can be diametrically opposed because, some approaches were very superficial and also their descriptions, while others were meticulously presented.

World system as a unit of analysis

Schriewer (1996) highlights that it was not until the late twentieth century, that the world is taken as a unit of analysis in the sense that the vision of multiple regional societies or separate nations expires. The comparison is replaced by historical reconstructions or global analysis of transnational interdependence. Tenbruck (1981) proposes an analysis of transnational interdependence and cross-cultural diffusion, which, in terms of Elias, refers to the *relatedness*. Then, by the end of the twentieth century and under the concept of the *world as a unit of analysis*, the environments are depending on each other, and the concept of autonomous societies separated nationally and regionally is left behind. "Global System" contrasts and counterpoises with the identity of the town, the nation-state, national culture, individuality, political autonomy, multiplicity of mutually independent societies. And thus the concept of a society constructed from natural science models (in its causal relationship) is questioned.

This idea of a global system as a network of transnational and transcultural interdependence in environments depending on each other, strongly agrees with the construction proposed by Elias in his *Sociology of Knowledge*. According to Guerra (2012), from Elias's perspective, knowledge is something that has been accumulated throughout history and it is very fortunate for everyone that it has been transferred from generation to generation. In that sense, it is not something that depends solely on the isolated subject (*homo clausus*), that sees only cause and effect relationships, but it is a product that has been appearing since the *homines aperti*, and understood as a social product, a product constructed on interdependence networks and/or human social relationships. Within this framework, knowledge is something produced by humankind, which has been developing as a changing social process (human generations). So, that knowledge is *essential relatedness*, resulting from the civilization process.

For Elias, the process of knowledge is an approach made by a group of people who use their own resources to attain a constantly improving knowledge, neither true nor false but "relatively adequate" or "inadequate". It is the relationship between the oldest existing knowledge and the new results, achieving a progressively better adjustment. Elias does not agree with Kant, and mentions that relational knowledge is not innate, as it depends on the experience and wealth of accumulated knowledge and transmitted by previous generations.

This essential relatedness of humans, focused the discussion of *homo clausus* vs. *homines aperti*, because it is acknowledged that knowledge is not an innate construction of an individual but rather that the individual is generated by an intergenerational process, accumulated throughout time, in a spiral rising form. In this regard, the contributions of Elias in the construction of the notions of

internationalization, world and interrelation networks used in the epistemological framework of comparative studies in education, represent a very important step in the theory of knowledge, which considers humankind as subject of knowledge, rather than isolated individuals, groups of individuals structured in imaginary models linked to the civilizing process.

For Elias, there is a mixture of objectivity/subjectivity in the process of knowledge construction, since there is no domain of one over the other. In any case, what is offered in the construction of knowledge is the position of the person or group, characterized by a commitment (subjectivity) or estrangement (objectivity).

The commitment refers to emotions and detachment, a balanced reflection of the object, that it is relative, not absolute. In the process of civilization, linked to the development of knowledge, from Elias' perspective, it has been called *dually-linked*: where the physiological and sociological senses are located, where the greater weight can be in the subjective conditions (commitment-emotionalism) or where appropriate, in the objective conditions (detachment). Therefore when there is a greater development of knowledge and science there will be better reflective objective conditions (modern societies) and when the development of objective conditions decreases, the emotions and the prevalence of subjective conditions (prejudices and fears: animistic societies) will be greater; thus less advancement of science and knowledge in the process of civilization.

The process of civilization presupposes: a greater control of emotions or instinctual self-control, the impulses are limited and "rational" capabilities are being used. This is where "The progress in the world's domain has been given in an intergenerational manner, by the transmission and use of symbols and knowledge" (Guerra, 2012, pp. 54-55). Thus, Elias indicates that in the civilizing process there is an ability to show the relationships or the relatedness of things, in the sense that no generation starts from scratch, but rather that we are all carriers of knowledge development. In this direction and according to Guerra (2012), in order to have a further advancement of social knowledge, scientists must overcome several obstacles, including the following:

- 1) Greater independence of social sciences in relation to the natural ones, especially with respect to their methodologies.

- 2) Humans require to see with more objectivity (distancing) that social life, things and processes, take place in a relational process and not only as a product of his own subjectivity. This involves conducting a "de-anchoring" or "unlearning" process.

- 3) Social scientists must modify their heteronymous behavior or the prevalence of tensions, passions and feelings as human beings. That is, that there is a contradiction between their role as social scientists and their individual position and commitment as members of a group; an essential contradiction to understand the problem that has to be resolved.

For Elias (Guerra, 2012, pp. 57-60), social knowledge is disseminated in *interdependence networks*; it is created in relation to the power structure in the scientific institutions, among dominant groups of more "established" disciplines, linked to the methods of natural sciences, emulated in the field of social sciences and with more strength than other marginalized groups. Both groups seek to improve their positions in the figurative framework in which they are, in a context

where a working social division is extremely uneven, since they tend to differ specially in their ideological traditions and values.

Guerra (2012) mentions that the scientific departments or disciplines behave as if they were sovereign States that quarrel among themselves, within the framework of a working division which is required in the exploration of the world, taking as a basis the expansion of the world of knowledge. He mentions that a discipline has more power when it is more established, since it tends to accentuate its differences in relation to other disciplines, in a competition towards power opportunities between groups.

In short, the concept of *Homines aperti* that Elias handles, gives man the possibility to open up to others (*being-with-others*), but not in the *Heideggerian* sense, *in regards to the essence of the being and his time*, it refers to reaching formulations of interdependence networks of people, relational nature of human beings and in close interdependence between subject and object, referred to as double bond.

These approaches are consistent with the idea of “World System” developed by Schriewer, since he views a global context of relationships of interdependence at a world level against closed national systems, which do not allow us to view the effects of internationalism in education. Hence the need to develop the “World System” as a process of building large-scale networks, transcontinental trade relations.

In building the method for comparison, we must surpass the level where we can only identify gradual similarities or differences that are viewed as basic operations or as (visible) differences in social life. These must be combined with universal ways of thinking, and we must perceive the “cultural otherness”. These interpretations have a social relationship: that is, to compare relationships and not just objects, which would be a simple comparison, unlike comparing generalities of a universal character. Scientific comparison involves not only data but also theories and critical corroboration, so the method involves not only identifying similarities and ordering differences but also *apprehending those differences*.

According to Schriewer (1996), and based on Bergersen’s and Tennbruck’s proposals, the emergence of the global means to see the world system as a collective and emerging reality (still in construction and therefore incomplete), implies a change of paradigm. The old comparison (Durkheim) is replaced by the global analysis of transnational interdependence and re-emerges as a critical entity to consider the relationship of the whole to the parts and of the parts to the whole, as well as considering the global context of the interdependence relationships at a world level, and also to consider that the idea of a *world system* (proposed by Wallerstein) confirms the Dependency Theory of 1950, as an earlier form of this new paradigm, leaving behind the Modernization Theory. We can say, then, that there is a shift from the Dependency Theory (with its idea of the emergence of the division of labor), to the analysis on issues about trading relationships between industrialized developed nations and dependent countries, which is identified as a **world system**, as a *sui generis* emerging reality.

Wallerstein’s idea (1989) revolves around the modern world system, this takes the form of a world economy in a capitalist society, the world economy has been expanding to encompass the entire earth, it has had expansion and contraction

moments and a variable geographical location according to the economic roles of the dominant countries and it has undergone a transformation process that is still ongoing. In this context, analysis of the national education systems can only be fully explained by taking into account their respective positions within a global structure (supranational).

Having in mind the above, Schriewer (2011) recognizes that there are certain trends about the emergence of a world educational system:

- a) A uniform educational expansion (confirming education as an important element of a transnational social system).
- b) A model of scholastic education (common world management structure).
- c) An institutionalized schooling in the expansion and globalization context that entails the processes of modernization of society.
- d) International communication: information transmission and supranational publications.
- e) A wide range of international organizations (UNESCO-OECD-World Bank).
- f) A hierarchical system of science that pretends the universalization of a particular vision of the world (the viewpoint of the International Organizations).

Also, in this trend three stages of development are identified in the construction of this world educational system, where production, distribution and legitimation that are considered scientifically relevant are controlled by the supranational throughout the world.

- 1) National characteristics which are at the same time transnational characteristics.
- 2) Global trends of massive and uniform expansion (as in the case of the universities).
- 3) Academic mobility and academic journeys.

Therefore, in education, comparative research has a component of various interrelation networks which are:

- The relationship between employment policies and labor markets with social and educational policies.
- Increased interconnection between professional or vocational education and training systems, qualified structures of working force and work organization.
- The interconnection between education, modernization and development.

Conclusion

In accordance with the previous statements, we face the need to coexist with some ambivalences in the international processes, which have to be rescued in order to transform the comparative studies in education, (where we identify the reconciliation between history and comparison); tensions between homogenization and differentiation; ambivalence between tradition and modernity; trends of internationalization vs. regionalization, and ambivalence between supranational integration and the strengthening of the Nation State.

Thus, the *relational* aspects developed by Elias, will be useful to show the new perspective of comparative studies in education, particularly for trends in comparative education based on the world system, with a supranational vision.

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