

Comparative Education at universities in Tanzania and in South Africa and the expectations and motivations of students

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Abstract

In view of the northern hemispheric hegemony in education and in view of contemporary curriculum theory which prescribes an input by students as clients, the authors of two Southern countries, Tanzania and South Africa, surveyed their students' expectations of a comparative education course, in an attempt to contribute to the establishment of a more meaningful comparative education for the South. The survey revealed startling divergences regarding South African and Tanzanian students' expectations of comparative education. South African students looked onto comparative education to enlighten the domestic education reform project, and to improve their (students') teaching strategies. In contrast, the Tanzanian students had a more detached (from their day-to-day education needs) and purely intellectual view of comparative education, expecting the subjects to contribute to their intellectual moulding and development. The authors relate these differences to contextual differences between South Africa and Tanzania, and conclude that contextual factors should be taken into account when designing comparative education courses.

Introduction

Globally, scholars appear to share the view that comparative education has a long history (Makatiani, 2006; Pampanini, 2004). It was institutionalised as a university academic discipline in the beginning of the twentieth century in the United States of America (USA). Steiner-Khamsi (2000) reports that James E. Russel taught the first cooperative education course in the world, at Columbia University in the spring of 1900. Following the pace setting course of Isaac L. Kandel at Teachers College, Columbia University, courses in Comparative Education proliferated in the USA after 1920 (Wolhuter, 2008). By the mid-twentieth century, comparative education had a visible presence at universities of the North. In the countries of the South, comparative education at universities is a fairly recent development, dating back to the 1960s (cf. Anangisye, 2008; Muganda & Alphonse, 2006; Wolhuter *et al.*, 2007).

The authors judged the survey of students of two southern countries, South Africa and Tanzania, about their expectations of a comparative education course, as a worthwhile

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exercise. It contributed towards establishing a more meaningful comparative education for the South, which is important in view of the current northern hemisphere hegemony in education (splendidly encapsulated in two comparative education classics, written by Altbach (1982) and Arnove (1982)). Furthermore, it also responds to the demands of contemporary curriculum, which requires an input by students as clients (cf. Ornstein & Honkins, 1988).

Abiding with the dictum that education systems are shaped by societal forces, and could only be understood against the background of these forces, the article commences with an outline of the societal and educational background of the position of comparative education at universities in South Africa and Tanzania. The experience of students in these countries is presented and interpreted in the article.

Comparative Education in Teacher Education in South Africa and in Tanzania

South Africa

Comparative education gained a foothold at South African universities during the 1960s (see Bergh & Soudien, 2006). It enjoyed prominence in both undergraduate and especially post-graduate education courses, but also had an institutional infrastructure (in terms of departments of comparative education and staff exclusively occupied with comparative education) paralleled in very few places in the world (cf. Wolhuter, 1994). In the post-1994 restructuring of teacher education, however, comparative education fell on hard ground (cf. Wolhuter, 2006; Wolhuter *et al.*, 2007:131-132). The pressures of financial stringency and of streamlining, which saw the collapse of small departments into bigger and more economical schools, as well as the restructuring of teacher education around skills rather than academic disciplines as basic units of teacher education courses, have taken their toll. The latter indicates the influence of the forces of global marketing and neo-liberalism, which led to a much greater decline of comparative education in teacher education in Western countries. Kubow and Fossum (2007:17) emphasise that the decline is brought about in particular by “the accountability movement, and the attendant market demands to produce a steady supply of teachers, which has resulted in a teacher preparation curriculum that is limited in duration and scope and that is increasingly shaped by externally imposed standards and characterized by measurable teacher ‘competencies’ ”. Teaching is increasingly being considered a skills-based profession, in which teachers use competences to bring about pre-specified learning outcomes. Comparative education is not considered to have anything to offer to the development of competences, and consequently becomes sidelined (Schweisfurth, 1999; McGrath, 2001; Crossley & Watson, 2003).

In the situation portrayed in the previous paragraph, few universities in South Africa still offer comparative education modules under that name. The trend is that comparative education is not studied *per se*, but subsumed in a variety of themes deemed necessary for teacher education. Such themes in the current teacher education programmes of South African universities include: structure of education systems, principles and foundations of outcomes-based education; the South African education system; the education system and school management; educational change; policy studies and governance in education; education system planning; educational policy studies; policy issues in South African

education; civic education; democracy and education; human rights education; the context of schooling; justice, democracy and education; and issues in education (Weeks *et al.*, 2006).

Tanzania

Comparative education, as a field of study in Tanzania, dates back to the 1960s – its beginnings have close links with the establishment of the Department of Education at the University College of Dar es Salaam in 1964 (Anangisye, 2008:304). The course *Contemporary Problems of Education in East Africa* dealt with the problems facing education in the East Africa region: Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda and Zanzibar (University of East Africa (UEA), 1966). These problems were addressed in the light of the geographical, historical, economic and sociological settings of each country. More specifically, the focus was on problems of the classroom, curriculum, school organisation and educational administration. It was taught and learned until the time when the UEA was disbanded, to be suspended in Tanzania by the University of Dar es Salaam, on 1 July 1970.

In the 1970 calendar of the university, comparative education is visible in the course *History, Theory and Practice of education*. The course introduced students to the problems of education as they affected Tanzania, in the wider context of traditional, colonial and post-independence education in Africa and beyond (University of Dar Es Salaam, 1970:87).

Since then, there have been different courses. Chronologically, the first was *Contemporary education in East Africa*. The analysis of the educational development in the three East African countries was its main concern. As the countries were former “colonies”, particular issues that were addressed related to the impact of the West on education. Secondly, during the same period, there was *Comparative Education* alongside *Contemporary Education in East Africa*. Thirdly, *Philosophy of Education – Comparative Practice* was later introduced. This course addressed philosophy and education in the light of case studies drawn from several selected countries – United States of America, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, China and Cuba. Fourthly, *Development and Trends in Teacher Education* featured as a course in teacher education. This course took on a comparative education character.

Fifthly, with the establishment of the Faculty of Education in the 1988/89 academic year, one more course, *Education in Developing Countries*, was created and made part of the curriculum in the Department of Educational Foundations. This course was related to education in different selected countries, mainly China and Cuba. It was a core, and therefore compulsory subject for students in the faculty.

According to Anangisye (2008:205), the following imperatives are evident as shaping forces of comparative education at the University of Dar Es Salaam:

- Globalisation: in today’s interdependent, interconnected global society, no nation can exist in isolation. Events which take place in one part of the world ripple throughout the entire world to become global realities that impact on different peoples and nations (Gutek, 2006:3).

- Education and comparative education in Tanzania were ideologically driven: In 1967, Tanzania chose to build a socialist society. Informed by the Ideology of *Socialism and Self-Reliance Education for Self-Reliance*, it drew on insights from selected cases of countries in the Socialist block: China, Cuba, and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.
- Tanzanian scholars who were returning from studies in the West and East, brought with them different educational insights which found a place in different curricula of education studies.

Turning to the present state of comparative education at the University of Dar Es Salaam, the general state of infrastructure at the university is an area of great concern. While the number of students is on the increase, the supply of facilities did not grow proportionally, library services are not sufficient and are not favourable for users – students, members of academic staff and public. Furniture in lecture and seminar rooms is problematic, information and communication technology is a challenge and computers are not adequate for students to undertake studies comfortably. For example, the Faculty of Education, which has more than 300 students, must rely on fewer than twenty computers. This state of affairs has implications for teaching, research and consultancy services.

Comparative education has been maintained at the University of Dar Es Salaam. A new course, *International and Comparative Education*, developed from the amalgamation of the courses *Education in Developing Countries* and *Contemporary Education in East Africa* (mentioned above). It is an elective undergraduate course for student teachers. The focus is on the relation between education and national development. Various theories of development are examined: modernisation, human capital, modes of production, and Marxist and neo-Marxist theories (University of Dar Es Salaam, 2005:212).

At post-graduate level, comparative education course is compulsory for all students in the Masters of Education programme. This course is devoted to a comparative analysis of education systems and educational processes in various countries, with a sharper focus on the systems and practices in developing countries. The global overview and the narrowed-down focus on developing countries are intended to illuminate a wider context in which to analyse problems and prospects of education in economic, social, political as well as cultural development of Tanzania and the East African Region (University of Dar Es Salaam, 2005:563).

It is not only at undergraduate level where comparative education figures. At the MEd level, students who are completing the comparative education course are expected to define comparative education, give reasons for studying the subject, and analyse and assess the history and methodologies of comparative education. They must analyse global education trends, e.g. modernisation and expansion of education; analyse education innovation in selected countries; discern general developments in education in Tanzania since independence; and analyse educational reforms in Tanzania and how it is influenced by world education trends.

Research Method

Survey research, specifically questionnaires, was judged to be the best method to investigate the research problem, namely students' motivation for and expectations of a comparative education course. Probably no other data collection tool is used more frequently in social research than the survey questionnaire. It allows the accumulation of ideas from individuals at relatively low costs (in terms of both time and money) to the researcher (Black & Champion, 1976: 379). The research instrument that was used was a questionnaire consisting of closed and open questions (see appendix 1). Respondents were firstly asked what they knew about comparative education, Secondly they were asked why they wanted to study comparative education, and to rank nine reasons in order of importance (see closed section, question 1, appendix 1). There was also an open section, where space was provided for respondents to comment on the above, and to add other reasons. Finally, respondents were asked what they thought they would learn during the course, and to rank the six items in order of importance (see closed section, question 2, appendix 1). In this case, too, there were spaces for respondents to comment on the above, and to add other motivations.

The questionnaire was completed by a cohort of BEd honours students at the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, in South Africa, at the onset of their comparative education course, on the first day of class. They were given unlimited time to complete the questionnaire. In South Africa, an honours degree is a post-graduate programme between a bachelor's and a master's degree. The cohort was part-time students, mostly experienced teachers who wished to further their qualifications to enable them to become school principals. Undergraduate (Tanzania) and postgraduate (South African) students were compared, because those are the respective points where students in the two countries make their first acquaintance with comparative education.

The questionnaire was also completed by Tanzanian students, undergraduate student teachers, at the onset of the course *International and comparative education* at the University of Dar Es Salaam.

Results

What do you know about the field of education?

72% of the Tanzanian students viewed comparative education as a study of educational comparisons and differences in different countries of the world. 6% of the students acknowledged that they had no idea as to what comparative education was.

In the South African class, 4,1% responded that they knew nothing of comparative education. 89% indicated that they saw it as the study of other national systems of education – their different methods, styles and structures. 33% reported that it involves studying and/or using the best of systems, practices and policies in order to improve the South African education system.

Why study comparative education?

The responses of the Tanzanian and South African students to the question why they study comparative education are presented in tables 1 (Tanzania) and 2 (South Africa).

Table 1. Why do you study comparative education? Rank order of responses of Tanzanian students. Percentages of students who assigned each rank order:

Reason	Rank order								
	(1 – most important – 9 least important)								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	% of responses								
Exciting	0	0	0	0	0	5,5	22,0	16,6	55,9
To help me to get a teaching job abroad	5,5	0	0	11,0	5,5	22,5	5,5	33,9	16,6
Interesting	5,5	0	0	0	5,5	22,0	16,6	33,8	16,6
Worthwhile	0	5,5	0	5,5	16,6	28,2	16,6	11,0	16,6
Knowledge of other education systems	55,9	16,6	22,0	5,5	0	0	0	0	0
Broaden mind/personal development	28,2	11,0	16,6	16,6	16,6	5,5	0	0	5,5
To improve my teaching	5,5	0	0	16,6	33,8	22,0	16,6	0	5,5
To compare our education system with others	22,0	50,5	11,0	11,0	0	0	5,5	0	0
To compare various education systems	22,0	11,0	32,4	16,6	11,0	0	0	0	0

Table 2. Why do you study comparative education? Rank order of responses of South African students. Percentages of students who assigned each rank order:

Reason	Rank order								
	(1: most important – 9: least important)								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	% of responses								
Exciting	0	14	0	14	0	7	18	32	15
To help me find a teaching job abroad	4	0	0	11	0	4	8	19	54
Interesting	0	8	11	11	8	19	26	15	2
Worthwhile	8	0	0	15	4	23	27	12	11
Knowledge of other education systems	19	26	19	22	11	3	0	0	0
To broaden my mind/ for personal development	11	26	15	30	18	0	0	0	0
To improve my teaching	12	19	12	27	15	12	0	0	3
To compare our education system with others	15	12	23	27	4	12	7	0	0
To compare various education systems	8	27	15	19	8	8	4	11	0

South African students' motivations for studying comparative education differ from those of the Tanzanian students. "Knowledge of other systems" transpired to be the most

common motivation among the Tanzanian students, followed by “to broaden my mind/ for personal development” and “to compare various education systems”. This hierarchy was reiterated in the open-ended section, for example: “I want to know how education provided in a certain country is different from ours”; “I want to understand the education background of different countries in the world”; and “To help me to compare how education is provided or offered in different geographical locations.”

South African students, on the other hand, had purely utilitarian motives for studying comparative education. Two main factors emerged as motivating South African students to study comparative education. They yearned for “knowledge of other systems” and “to compare the South African education system with others” (first and second most important reason in the close section, cf. table 2), in order to improve the South African education system. In the open-ended section, they accordingly made comments such as: “To compare education systems and improve our own”; “Very important to evaluate one’s own system against other systems of the world”; “To be able to improve our system”; “We must learn whether we are on track with the rest of the world”; and “To find out what is wrong with our system.” The second factor is to improve the student’s teaching skills: “From the different strategies I can learn strategies to improve my own strategy”; and “I need to transform as a teacher because our education system is undergoing transformation.”

What do you think you will learn during the course?

Table 3 and 4 present the results for the closed questions for respectively the Tanzanian and the South African students.

Table 3. What do you think you will learn during the comparative education course? Responses of Tanzanian students. Percentages of students who assigned each rank order:

Category	Rank order					
	(1 – most important – 9 least important)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	% of responses					
Teaching strategies from other countries	11,0	0	11,0	50,5	22,0	5,5
How to get a teaching job abroad	0	0	0	0	33,0	67,0
Different Cultures	5,5	11,0	11,0	22,0	39,5	11,0
Education Systems	22,0	22,0	33,7	16,6	0	5,5
Comparisons between systems of education	44,0	44,0	12,0	0	0	0
Broaden education knowledge	56,0	22,0	22,0	5,5	0	5,5

Table 4. What do you think you will learn during the comparative education course? Responses of South African students. Percentages of students who assigned each rank order:

Category	Rank order					
	(1 – most important – 6 least important)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
% of responses						
Teaching strategies from other countries	22	19	19	30	7	3
How to get a teaching job abroad	0	0	0	4	15	81
Different cultures	0	30	15	15	30	10
Education systems	19	37	19	19	6	0
Comparisons between systems of education	30	37	15	15	3	0
Broaden education knowledge	11	26	7	22	26	8

Discussion

The expectations of the South African students and that of the Tanzanian students are quite divergent. These differences might be related to contextual differences. The South African students looked forward to a course which will be of value to improve the South African education system and to assist them to improve their teaching endeavour. South Africa is currently in the throes of a fundamental societal (social, political, economic and educational) reconstruction project. Education is widely looked upon as the main instrument to effect the desired political, social and economic transformation (cf. Wolhuter, 1999). The inherited education system and ways of teaching are seen as inferior and outdated; and foreign, international trends are perceived to be the model for South Africa to emulate (De Wet & Wolhuter, 2007). The interest in knowledge of the outside world is intensified by the fact that South Africa has recently emerged from an intellectual boycott which large sectors of the outside world had waged for some three decades against the country, isolating it from intellectual and educational developments in the rest of the world (Harricombe & Lancaster, 1995).

Tanzania, on the other hand, has long since passed through the post-independence educational and societal reconstruction of the 1960s (cf. Wolhuter, 2004). Thus, Tanzanian students have a somewhat more detached (from everyday practice), pure intellectual expectation from their comparative education course.

The comparative study highlighted the role of the contextual factors in shaping students' expectations of a comparative education course, and the imperative to develop home-grown courses and instruction material (curricula, textbooks, etc.), steering away from northern hemisphere material, which was developed in the very different Northern context, thus ensuring that comparative education courses are meaningful and enriching experiences in the lives of students. The study also gives cues as to how to go about to improve the value of comparative education courses in students' education; not only in ensuring that students' pronounced needs are served, but also beyond that. In Tanzania,

for example, failed experiments in education are still fresh in memory: comparative education courses could be drafted where students are shown the value of learning from foreign experience in the field of education. In the case of South Africa, on the other hand, designers of comparative education courses should bring to the attention of students the value of comparative education with regard to the general educational development of students and the broadening of their minds.

It is tempting to generalise the findings of this study to other countries. Yet, comparative education cautions about the summarily extrapolations of findings from one country to another. As national contexts differ, such an exercise is fraught with caveats. But it would be interesting to investigate (and this would be scientifically justified) what students from other countries expect from comparative education courses, and what motivate them to study comparative education. A host of countries (Eastern European countries, China, Cuba) were the terrain both of radical educational experimentation and international isolation; and it would be interesting to investigate whether their students follow the pattern of the South African students or the Tanzanian students. Furthermore, the motivations of students in countries of the northern hemisphere for taking comparative education should be probed: are comparative education courses in those countries indeed aligned with the needs and motivations of their students? A repetition of this study in more countries would therefore be a valuable supplement to this study.

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Appendix 1 The questionnaire
Pre-questionnaire: open ended questions

1. What do you know about the field of study 'comparative education'?

2. Why study CIE?

3. What do you think you will learn during this course?

Pre-questionnaire: closed questions

1. Why study CIE?

Rank the following reasons in order of importance, where 1 is the most important and 9 the least, and also give comments to motivate your response.

Category	Rank	Comments
Exciting		
To help me to teach abroad		
Interesting		
Worthwhile		
To gain knowledge of other systems		
To broaden my mind / for personal development		
To improve my teaching		
To compare South African Education system with others		
To compare various		

Education systems		
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2. What do you think you will learn during the course?

Rank the following items in order of importance, where 1 is the most important and 6 the least, and also give comments to motivate your response.

Category	Rank	Comments
Teaching strategies from other countries		
How to get a job teaching abroad		
Different cultures		
Education systems		
Comparison between systems of Education		
Broaden general education knowledge		