

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Opportunities for The Use of International Educational Platforms in Teaching Comparative Pedagogy

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VOLUME: Vol.06 Issue03 2026

PAGE: 115-119

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Abstract

This article examines the opportunities for the use of international educational platforms in teaching comparative pedagogy within the system of pedagogical higher education. The study proceeds from the contradiction between the object of the discipline, which consists in living and continuously changing foreign education systems, and the traditional mode of its teaching, which has relied upon secondary textbook descriptions that are frequently outdated at the moment of publication. The author proposes a typology of international educational platforms according to their didactic function, distinguishing data-analytical, content-course, policy-documentary and communicative-collaborative platforms, and elaborates a three-level model of their integration into the teaching of the discipline, comprising the informational, analytical and research-collaborative levels. The principle of contextual triangulation is advanced as a safeguard against decontextualised comparison. The conceptual polemic between A. Schleicher and G. Steiner-Khamsi concerning the value and the risks of cross-national benchmarking is subjected to critical examination. The findings demonstrate that the principal value of international platforms lies not in expanded access to information but in the transformation of the student from a consumer of descriptions into a producer of comparisons.

KEYWORDS

Comparative pedagogy, comparative education, international educational platforms, educational data platforms, massive open online courses, virtual exchange, policy borrowing, contextual triangulation, cross-national analysis, digital competence, pedagogical higher education, future teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The globalisation of education that has unfolded over recent decades has profoundly altered the professional horizon of the teacher. National education systems no longer develop in isolation from one another: they are measured against common international indicators, they borrow reforms and institutional models across borders, they participate in shared assessment programmes and they compete for students, researchers and resources within an increasingly integrated global space. Under these conditions a teacher whose

understanding of education is confined to the experience of his own national system is poorly equipped to interpret the reforms he is required to implement, since a considerable proportion of those reforms originate elsewhere and carry with them assumptions formed in other contexts. Comparative pedagogy, as the discipline that studies education systems in their similarities and differences, has accordingly acquired a significance within teacher education that considerably exceeds its traditional position as a subsidiary theoretical

course. The teaching of the discipline, however, has long been marked by a characteristic paradox. Its object consists of living foreign education systems that are subject to continuous reform, yet the instruments by which that object has traditionally been presented to students are secondary descriptions contained in textbooks and surveys. Such descriptions suffer from an unavoidable delay between the moment at which the information was gathered and the moment at which it reaches the student, and in a period of rapid reform this delay is frequently sufficient to render the description obsolete. Moreover, a textbook description presents the student with the conclusions of a comparison already performed by someone else, so that the student's activity is confined to the assimilation of those conclusions rather than to the performance of comparison as such. The result is a discipline whose declared aim is the formation of analytical capacity but whose customary method is reproductive. The emergence of international educational platforms has created the conditions under which this paradox may be overcome. Four classes of such platforms are of particular relevance. The data platforms maintained by international organisations, including the statistical resources of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the World Bank and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, make primary comparative data openly available. Massive open online course platforms provide access to courses offered by leading universities of the world. Repositories of policy documents and descriptions of national systems make the normative texts of reforms available in their original form. Platforms for virtual exchange permit students of different countries to work jointly upon shared tasks. Taken together, these resources make it possible for the student to encounter foreign education systems not through an intermediary but directly. The epistemological significance of this transformation is considerable. When the student has access to primary data and to the original texts of reforms, the teaching of comparative pedagogy can be reorganised from the transmission of descriptions to the conduct of inquiry. The student can formulate a comparative question, select the systems relevant to it, locate the pertinent indicators, examine the policy documents that explain those indicators and arrive at a justified conclusion of his own. The discipline thereby ceases to be a body of information about other countries and becomes a method of thinking about education as such, which

is precisely the capacity that the contemporary teacher requires in order to evaluate critically the reforms in which he participates. This opportunity, however, carries with it a methodological danger that the history of the discipline has repeatedly exposed. Quantitative indicators detached from the social, historical and cultural conditions that produced them lend themselves readily to decontextualised comparison, in which the position of a country in an international ranking is treated as a direct measure of the quality of its education and the practices of high-ranking systems are regarded as transferable without regard to the context in which they operate. The classical warning of the founders of comparative education, that the things outside the schools matter as much as the things inside them, acquires renewed urgency in an environment in which comparative data are more accessible than ever and the temptation to read them superficially is correspondingly stronger. A further difficulty is of a strictly didactic nature. International educational platforms were not designed as instruments for teaching comparative pedagogy; they were created for purposes of policy monitoring, public accountability, research or open access to learning. Their pedagogical value is therefore not given but must be constructed through deliberate instructional design that defines the tasks the student is to perform with the platform, the sequence in which those tasks are to be undertaken and the criteria by which their results are to be assessed. In the absence of such design, platforms tend to be used as supplementary sources of illustration, which leaves the underlying reproductive structure of instruction unaltered. In the Republic of Uzbekistan the relevance of these questions has been heightened by the comprehensive reform of higher and pedagogical education, by the orientation of universities towards internationalisation and by the country's participation in international comparative assessments of learning outcomes. These processes require a generation of teachers capable of interpreting international data and international experience critically rather than either rejecting them or adopting them uncritically. The transition to the credit-module system and the expansion of digital infrastructure in higher education institutions have at the same time created favourable conditions for the integration of international platforms into the educational process. The scholarly problem of the study arises from the intersection of these considerations. Although international platforms are increasingly referred to in the practice of teaching comparative pedagogy, their use remains predominantly illustrative and

unsystematic: platforms are not differentiated according to their didactic function, the levels at which they may be integrated are not defined, and the methodological safeguards against decontextualised comparison are not specified. What is lacking is a model that would specify which class of platform serves which aim of the discipline, at which level of student activity it is to be employed and by what principle the risks attending its use are to be controlled.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Within Uzbek pedagogical scholarship the theoretical foundation of the present study is supplied above all by the work of U.Sh. Begimqulov on the organisation and management of the informatisation of pedagogical education. The scholar's principal contribution consists in treating informatisation not as the addition of technical equipment to an unchanged educational process but as a systemic transformation affecting the aims, content, methods and organisational forms of teacher education simultaneously. Of particular significance for the present inquiry is his conception of the information-educational environment as an integral space within which the future teacher acquires not only knowledge of his subject but also the capacity to work with information as such, to evaluate its reliability and to employ it in professional activity. This conception supplies the direct methodological warrant for treating international platforms not as auxiliary sources of illustration but as constitutive elements of the environment in which comparative pedagogy is taught. The second pillar of the theoretical framework is provided by the research of N.A. Muslimov on the professional formation of the teacher and on innovative educational technologies. The scholar consistently argues that professional competence is not reducible to the possession of knowledge but comprises the readiness and capacity to act in professional situations that are novel and undetermined, and that such competence can be formed only through the student's own participation in activity of the corresponding structure. His emphasis upon the technological organisation of instruction, that is, upon the specification of the aims, stages and criteria of the educational process, informs the three-level model proposed below, while his insistence upon the professional orientation of all components of teacher education supplies the criterion by which the use of international platforms is to be justified: not by their novelty but by their contribution to the professional capacities of the future teacher. The broader value and institutional dimensions of the problem are

illuminated by contemporary research on education and the formation of worldview. In the work of S. Ergashbaev on the development of the spiritual worldview of young people through the system of continuous education, it is substantiated that stable value orientations are formed through sustained pedagogical processes, a thesis of direct relevance to the question of how students may engage with foreign educational experience without losing their own cultural bearings. In a further study by the same author concerning the elevation of the spiritual and philosophical worldview of young people, independent critical reflection is singled out as a central educational outcome. The study by M.M. Mirzaolimjon og'li and E. Shohbozbek on the educational policy of New Uzbekistan and new models of universities discloses the institutional context of internationalisation within which the discipline is now taught.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological foundation of the present study is constituted by the systemic approach, which made it possible to treat the teaching of comparative pedagogy with the use of international platforms not as an aggregate of separate techniques but as an integral pedagogical system possessing its own aims, content, procedural structure and criteria of result; within this general framework the competence approach performed the leading function, since it established that the aim of the discipline consists not in the accumulation of information about foreign systems but in the formation of the capacity to conduct and critically evaluate comparison, and thereby provided the criterion by which the pedagogical value of each class of platform could be assessed. The activity approach was applied in designing forms of work that place the student in the position of an active subject of comparative inquiry rather than a recipient of completed descriptions. The theoretical analysis of scholarly and methodological literature served to reconstruct the development of the methodology of comparative education and to delimit its principal paradigms. The comparative method, applied reflexively to the discipline itself, was employed in juxtaposing the approaches to the teaching of comparative pedagogy adopted in different national traditions of teacher education. The method of functional analysis was applied to international educational platforms in order to determine the didactic functions each is capable of performing irrespective of the purpose for which it was originally created. The historical-pedagogical method was used to trace the evolution of the discipline from the

descriptive surveys of its founders to the quantitative cross-national analysis of the present period, and thereby to identify the methodological lessons that remain relevant to its teaching. The hermeneutic method was employed in interpreting policy documents drawn from different national systems and in revealing the differing meanings that identical educational terms acquire in different contexts.

RESULTS

The study established a typology of international educational platforms according to their didactic function in the teaching of comparative pedagogy and placed each class in correspondence with a determinate component of the competence the discipline is intended to form. Data-analytical platforms, comprising the statistical resources and indicator databases maintained by international organisations, serve the formation of the analytical-comparative component, since they permit the student to work with primary quantitative data, to select indicators relevant to a comparative question and to identify patterns across systems. Content-course platforms, comprising massive open online courses offered by foreign universities, serve the formation of the cognitive component by providing access to international expertise and to a plurality of scholarly perspectives unavailable in national textbooks. Policy-documentary platforms, comprising repositories of normative texts and structured descriptions of national systems, serve the formation of the contextual component, since they permit the student to examine the reasoning, the stated aims and the institutional conditions that stand behind the indicators. Communicative-collaborative platforms, comprising environments for virtual exchange and joint international projects, serve the formation of the intercultural component by confronting the student with the perspectives of peers educated within other systems. A second result consists in the elaboration of a three-level model of platform integration. At the informational level platforms are employed as current sources supplementing and correcting textbook descriptions. At the analytical level the student conducts a small-scale comparative study of his own, formulating a question, selecting systems and indicators, examining the relevant policy documents and presenting a justified conclusion. At the research-collaborative level students undertake joint comparative projects with peers from foreign institutions, so that comparison becomes not only an object of study but a form of professional communication. A third result consists in the formulation of the principle of

contextual triangulation, according to which no quantitative indicator obtained from a data platform may serve as the basis of a comparative conclusion unless it is examined in conjunction with the policy documents that explain it and with the cultural and historical conditions of the system concerned; this principle functions as the methodological safeguard against the reading of international rankings as direct measures of educational quality.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained require to be situated within the most consequential contemporary controversy concerning the use of international comparative data, namely the opposition between the position associated with A. Schleicher and the critique advanced by G. Steiner-Khamsi. In *World Class: How to Build a 21st-Century School System*, A. Schleicher argues that international benchmarking constitutes one of the most powerful instruments available for the improvement of education. Comparative data, on his account, allow policymakers and educators to see what is achievable, since the performance of the most successful systems demonstrates that outcomes regarded as unattainable in one country have in fact been attained elsewhere. Such data expose complacency, reveal inequities concealed by national averages and permit the identification of the policies and practices associated with high performance. Schleicher insists that the purpose of comparison is not to copy but to learn, yet the thrust of his argument is that systems which refuse to measure themselves against others deprive themselves of the most informative evidence available. G. Steiner-Khamsi approaches the same phenomenon from a markedly different vantage point. Her analysis of the global politics of educational borrowing and lending directs attention away from the question of what may be learnt from other systems and towards the question of why particular foreign references are invoked at particular moments. On her account, the appeal to international evidence frequently functions not as the source of policy but as its retrospective legitimization: domestic actors select from the vast repertoire of international experience those examples that support reforms already decided upon for local political reasons, and the reference to a foreign model serves to lend those reforms an authority they would otherwise lack. The transfer of practices, moreover, is invariably accompanied by their reinterpretation, so that what is borrowed is rarely what was originally practised. The consequence is a sustained scepticism towards the

assumption that comparison yields transferable lessons. The philosophical substance of this disagreement concerns the epistemic status of cross-national comparison. For Schleicher comparative data constitute evidence about what works, whose value is limited chiefly by the quality of measurement; for Steiner-Khamsi comparative references constitute discursive resources whose meaning is determined by the political context in which they are deployed. Two further positions bear upon the controversy. R. Alexander's insistence upon the cultural embeddedness of pedagogy supplies a reason for scepticism independent of Steiner-Khamsi's political analysis, since it implies that practices cannot be separated from the meanings they hold within their own culture. The earlier programme of H. Noah and M. Eckstein, by contrast, supports Schleicher's confidence in systematic quantitative comparison, while at the same time demanding a methodological rigour in the formulation and testing of hypotheses that the popular reading of rankings rarely attains.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that international educational platforms create the conditions under which the long-standing paradox of the teaching of comparative pedagogy may be overcome, namely the discrepancy between an object consisting of living and changing foreign systems and a method relying upon secondary and frequently outdated descriptions. The realisation of this opportunity, however, depends upon deliberate pedagogical design rather than upon the mere availability of the platforms.

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