METHODOLOGIES IN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION: IN SEARCH OF AN APPROPRIATE MODEL FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

By
DR E. D. BABATUNDE

This article highlights the different approaches in Comparative Education. All the various schools of thought were exhaustively discussed and analysed; relationship between the various approaches underscored; advantages and disadvantages of each approach elucidated. Finally, the article suggests a model that could be used to advantage in the area of Comparative Education in Developing Countries.

Influence of Philosophy.

Comparative Education, like other branches of knowledge, owes some debt to Philosophy. Philosophical ideas which have had lasting influence on comparative Education include inductionism refined by J. S. Mill and Hypothetico-Deductionism which blends Karl Popper's ideas with those of Joseph Dewey on pragmatism. The former is historical in orientation while the latter is 'problem solving' or pragmatic in approach. Each of these philosophical orientations has brought its own insight to enrich the science of Comparative Education.

Mill (1970), has in his System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive enumerated the three basic tenets of his inductive method. The first step was to observe objectively and classify the terms. The second was to formulate from the evidence tentative explanatory hypotheses linking "causes" with "effects". The third step was to draw up universally valid laws about the physical and the social world from the information based on confirming data. Central to Mill's induction and the understanding of the influence it had on the methodologies of some comparative educationists is Mill's idea of explanation. Events are explained by reference to their antecedent causes. As Mill (1970) noted:

"... an individual fact is said to be explained by pointing out its cause, that is, by stating the law or laws... of which its production is an instance".

The two problematic areas of the Millsian method are its tendency to create universals and enthrone the absolute ignoring the fact that peculiar educational policies are formulated to meet peculiar situational demands and that the 'cause' 'effect' relationship does not often prove useful in social relations which, unlike experiments in the physical sciences, are not reversible.

The other major philosophical influence is hypothetico-deductionism propounded by Holmes (1975 p. 157). It is a blend of John Dewey's pragmatism and Popper's conventional or critical dualism. Dewey maintained in opposition to views that appeal to goodness as the beginning of thinking, that man begins to think when he encounters material difficulties which have to be overcome. Reflective thinking is primarily designed to solve problems. Popper recognises two types of laws the laws of nature and those of the society, normative laws. The former is fixed in its regularity and does not admit alteration. The latter is a product of the society and is alterable and refutable. Its openness to alteration and refutability qualifies it being scientific. From these two variants of philosophy, Holmes articulated his 'problem-solving' approach. It will, at this juncture be worthwhile to see how these philosophical influences are reflected in the works on methodology in Comparative Education.
Methodologies Influenced by Induction

The influence of Mill's inductive method is noticeable in the works of people like Isaac Kandel, Nicholas Hans and F. Schneider. It reaches a level of refinement in the positivism of Bereday and the hypothetico-deductionism of Noah and Eckstein. In their synthetic approach, Kandel, Schneider and Hans set out to describe educational systems and their historical growth in order to discover the principles which informed all national systems and to explain the causes of the differences between them. To accomplish their aims, they sought to evolve systems of classifications. Kandel stressed the factor of nationalism the vagueness of which concept was corrected by Hans who gave the features of the ideal nation as unity of belief, unity of language, unity of origin, compact territory and political sovereignty. Kandel had been content to state that “nationalism then implies a common language, common custom and a common culture” (1933:16). Vernon Mallinson emphasised national character.

Kandel, in his Studies in Comparative Education (1933), endeavoured to discuss the meaning of education in general in terms of what he called the forces: political, social and cultural. He saw the purpose and problems of education as similar in most countries though influenced by differences of tradition and culture of each. The comparative educationist should, in carrying out his research, give considerable touch to the degree to which the element of nationalism influences the educational system. He suggested the use of his classificatory “forces” in preference to reliance on such methods as statistical comparison, for example, of the total expenditure for education in different educational systems and the comparisons of expenditure between one institution and another within the same governmental system (e.g. education and welfare). The stumbling block to such a fruitful comparison is the uneven development of the statistical approach is all the systems to be compared. In conformity to his inductionist approach, Kandel regarded the true value of the contribution of comparative education as residing in the analysis of the causes which have produced them; in a comparison of the differences between the systems and the reasons that explain such differences; and in the attempted solutions. As he noted:

“... the comparative approach demands first an appreciation of the intangible, impalpable spiritual and cultural forces which underlie an educational system”.

Kandel was in agreement with Sadler that the factors and forces outside the school matter and are often more significant in the way they affect the school than actual what goes on in the school itself. He pointed out in International Review of Education that neither the classification of types nor even the fact that the studies are analytical rather than descriptive makes educational studies essentially comparative. The only criterion of comparability arrived at during the International Conference on Comparative Educators in Hamburg (1954) was that such a study should involve a comparison of at least two countries. Commenting on Kandel’s contribution, Bereday (1957) wrote in his article on comparative education that it was he:

“. . . Who perfected the art of comparison, not describing, not even classifying but freely shuttling from country to country, unhampered by the binding shackles of inadequate language, infrequent travel and scant training in academic disciplines.”

Knowing the rigorous criteria Kandel set for the art of comparison, it is difficult to conclude, as implied by Bereday that Kandel encouraged the researcher to shuttle freely from place to place ignoring the strong deficiency of the handicap of language yet building his research on the information gathered on such visits. Since research visits to various countries are so important to that aspect of Bereday’s work classified as Area Studies (it may be suggested) that he picked on Kandel’s stress on travels to foreign countries because of the desire to give support to his own work. Be that as it may, it is important to draw attention to the salient interests of
Kandel's methodology. His interest lay in determining facts before analysing them. His analysis was solely in the light of antecedent causes. His aim was to promote the improvement of education in the world.

There is, in Bereday's methodology, a consistent attempt to remain as faithful as possible to the canons of Millian induction. This assertion is amply buttressed by the persistent drive to discover general causes and the underlying principles, to collect and classify, all features of the inductionist. The irony in his methodological position is that while recognising the effective contribution of the 'problem approach' because it limits the range of research without impairing its comparative element, and because it roots the comparative subjects in the actual experience of the student, Bereday cannot break loose from restricting shackles of Millian inductionist explanations so as to take full advantage of a different philosophical base which informs the methodology of the "problem approach".

To the extent to which he did not break that shackle, Bereday could be likened in the field of the 'problem approach' to a weary Moses who having led his people within sight of the promised land of effective methodology will not, due to satisfaction with the known in preference for the unknown, participate in the analytical splendours that he had contemplated for so long and worked for so tirelessly. That task awaited a vibrant Joshua whose strength having been replenished at the energetic fountains of Dewey's pragmatism and Karl Popper's critical or conventional dualism gives a new lease of life to the battle-weary minds of constructors of an effective methodology for comparative education. Before that approach is discussed the selective list of inductionist methodologists will not be complete without a brief review of the contributions of Noah and Eckstein.

The methodology of Noah and Eckstein owes a lot to the works of Bereday, M.J.R. Cohen and L. Nagel. In his Introduction to Comparative Education, A. R. Trethewey quotes Noah and Eckstein as setting out to offer

"some quite unique and characteristic assistance in explaining observed phenomena in education and society . . . which was needed if comparative education would justify itself".

In actual fact, their appeal to contemporary models in social sciences, to the canons of inductionism and the works of Cohen, Nagel and Bereday belied the uniqueness of their method.

While accepting the influence of Bereday, they rejected his suggestion that enquiry should start with objective observation and classification on the legitimate grounds that such exercise leads to the gross accumulation of data as well as the dominance of a priori principles. They employed a basic axiom of Cohen and Nagel about Millian induction. Cohen and Nagel (1947 p. 17) had stated in their book An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method (1974) that it was fruitless assertion to insist that truth was found in studying facts, that rather, a problem demanding solution is the occasion for enquiry. They encourage the use of sampling techniques in order to show how a guiding hypothesis is tested. They described the procedure of Mill's methodology of experimental enquiry designed to establish invariable relationships of increasing generality by using his methods of agreement, difference, concomitant variation and the method of residues. All these efforts were geared to the discovery of the "cause" or "causes" of phenomena.

Noah and Eckstein (1969, p. 19) built on the claims of Cohen and Nagel by insisting on rejecting Mill's View that the world was ruled by universal laws. In doing this, they dissociated themselves from a purely historicist outlook. Furthermore, they disagreed with the inductionist tendency to relate causes to effects, insisting that the close relationship between variables by no means implies casual explanations one way or the other.

The contents of the methodology of Noah and Eckstein are, in part confusing, especially as the areas of meaning and operation of the steps overlap, in places. Thus, we have as part of
the third step the obligation to define and measure the value of concepts by social indicators which help to select the relevant data. The next step, the selection of cases, features again in the attempt to pick cases relevant to the data. Again, they disavowed a cause-effect relationship but are ready to identify certain tendencies in the system as resulting from certain postures of the society. However, Noah and Eckstein differ from their inductionist predecessors when they insisted that historical explanations should be replaced by empirical testing of functional statements by regression analysis intent on stressing covariation. Holmes, (1977 p. 118) as will be seen shortly, disagreed with the usefulness of the regression analysis partly because it is based on induction and partly because it is on comparative evidence which presents a static picture from which innovation and its consequences cannot be deduced.

The Hypothetico-Deductive: Brian Holmes

It was noted regarding the philosophical influences, that Holmes blended the basic ideas of Deweyan pragmatism and Popperian critical conventionalism to arrive at his 'problem approach' methodology. His overriding desire was to offer a model which provided a more consistent analytical basis for research in comparative education. This in turn was to aid the improvement of education by giving policymakers a surer ground on which to base their activities. Holmes believes that such a basis is obtainable through an accurate process of prediction which the "problem approach" methodology offers.

In this problems approach the prediction is not in terms of the descriptive and statistical studies which were vitiated by the absence of a generally accepted machinery data collection and by variations in nomenclature. The prediction is neither done in terms of reference to antecedent causes. It is in terms of Popperian philosophy, especially its mode of explanation, which involves deducing new information from stated laws and statements about specific initial conditions, statements which are tested when either the laws or initial conditions are problematic. Thus, it is an approach which refuses to treat laws as absolute, universal applicable and unchanging. It believes that, following Popper, the scientific status of any theory is its falsifiability or refutability.

Holmes employs the Deweyan stages of reflective thinking. The main constituents of his approach are:

a. Problem analysis and intellectualization,
b. Hypothesis or policy solution formulation,
c. The specification of initial conditions or context
d. The logical projection from adopted hypothesis of possible consequences,
e. Comparison of logical predicted outcome with observable events.

The classificatory system of Holmes is in two parts: The patterns, normative and institutional, and the second referred to as the mental states of people in the given society as well as the environment. The normative pattern embraces statements about norms and normative laws which (it is assumed) the people of a given society recognise and accept as holding. The criteria for drawing up this normative pattern are the theories of man, society and knowledge of the given society. Although open to dispute, national institutions and major legislations represent a measure of a nation's normative consensus. One test of coherence of the pattern resides in the fact that if an aspect of the traditional pattern was changed or rejected without corresponding change in all aspects, normative problem emerges.

The institutional pattern relates to the different institutions of a nation and included: political, economic, social and religious. The school as an institution has such aspects as administration, curriculum, examination, teaching and agency for discipline. The knowledge of the sociological laws which connect various institutions in the society is important if the impact of Holmesian institutional pattern is to be effective in policy formulation. Since institutions come into
existence for specific reasons, their aims must be constantly related to changes within the society. Furthermore, policy statements of institutions ought to take the form of sociological laws, admitting testing and refutation. Such statements would link either branches of an institution (e.g. administration and curriculum departments of the school) or link one institution with another. With such links, it would be possible to anticipate, to some extent, consequences of change either within one institution or the impact of change in one institution on other institutions within the society.

The other two aspects of Holmesian classificatory system are patterns of a nation's mental state and its environment. The mental state of a nation embraces the internalised value and beliefs which regulate the actions of the people and shape their world view. The mental state includes all that goes into making a people unique. It has been called various names by various people. Sadler called it the "living spirit"; Mallinson named it the "national character". It is that aspect of culture that is the last of change. Holmes suggests that a knowledge of this aspect of a people's life pattern is vital to the researcher or innovator because it helps him to anticipate reactions to new policies, especially if these touch upon what a people hold to be dear to them.

A closer look at the main constituents of Holmes' methodology (1965, p.37) will reveal how the diacritical distinctions of his classificatory system are employed in formulating policies.

In problem analysis, as the first step, the Researcher selects a problem out of many which are classified in terms of the dominant allied discipline such as educational problems of an economic nature. He could also select a problem under another taxonomy, that of the explosions, such as the population explosion and its multifaceted consequences, the explosion of knowledge and the explosion of expectations. These taxonomies provide the means for preliminary analysis. Thus the important point is that the problem gives rise to the exercise of seeking to formulate solutions.

The next step in the model is to formulate policy. This enables the researcher to avoid the pitfalls of indiscriminate borrowing on the assumptions that policy proposals which have worked elsewhere are bound to work everywhere. This attitude puts the researcher in developing countries to be on his guard and not indulge in the fallacy of wholesale importation. This represents the tendency to borrow educational policies which have worked in other places without first studying the conditions and the special undertones which influenced the successful implementation of those policies in their original places of formulation. To achieve this end, it is crucial that one identifies the specific initial conditions directly relevant to the situation as well as the possible influence of such variables as the normative, institutional and mental attitudes as they are bound to affect the policy. In other words, the mental state and environment ought to be given due consideration.

The formulation of policy with the identification of specific initial conditions leads to prediction. Prediction here is understood not in the Millsian term of explaining a fact by pointing out its cause but in terms of Popperian understanding. Explanation involves the deduction of a statement from two types of premises, from laws and from specific initial conditions. Thus, Holmes views explanation as involving three things.- the formulation of a law or laws and the specific initial condition, prediction and testing. If laws and initial conditions are given and new information is deduced from them, prediction takes place. Holmes (1965, p. 40) noted:

"Our interest in prediction is when we regard as given the generalisation and statements about initial conditions and wish to deduce future outcomes from these two types of statement. In this case, we assume that a policy has been adopted and is to be implemented in a particular country. Our task is to predict the practical outcomes of implementing policy".

Testing occurs when the laws and the initial conditions are problematic and the investigator compares deduced outcomes with experience: On this, Holmes (1965, p. 40) wrote:
“Testing implies that the scientist regards either the generalisation and the statements about initial conditions as problematic. His interest is in testing the prognosis from the statements by comparing predicted outcomes with observable events. In this situation, the comparative educationist is faced with the tasks of formulating alternatives policies, describing the conditions under which the alternative policy is likely to work by eliminating the others”.

Given this approach Co comparative educational research, the comparativist would cease to be ineffectual. His research, stimulated by the attempt to solve a given problem, analysed in terms of a general normative statement and specific initial conditions, would take into account basic facts very often ignored by policymakers of historicist persuasion.

Conclusions

Applied to Nigeria, educational policymakers should be concerned with wholesale borrowing of policies to implement the universal free primary education, but should balance the normative wish for such a programme with the available resources to implement it as well as the possible reactions of Nigerian Conservative groups against the proposal of enticing children of school age to schools and away from traditional occupations.

Rather than couch educational policies in absolute terms which try to deal only with universal aims, educational policymakers must respond to the need of their time, and place without necessarily ignoring themes and needs in education all the world over. The axiom in Comparative Education, ‘like the Society so is the School’, reflects the need for the school to constantly aspire to meet the demands of its society. The extent to which it succeeds in meeting this demand while permitting for a good knowledge of what is happening in the wider world is the extent to which its usefulness can be measured.

As a case in point, the Departments of Religious Education in the Universities in Nigeria could at this point in time adopt the inductionist historicist approach. The course content could include those which have featured in Syllabuses inherited from the colonial period. This may include, Introduction to Christianity and Islam, New Testament, Greek, Arabic. It will include, of course, the exegesis of parts of the Koran and the Bible and Sociology of Religion whose content has a ‘more universal the treatment of absolute terms as, ‘animism’, ‘primitive’ or even Levy-Bruhl’s idea of primitive mentality as ‘prelogical mentally’. With the silent overtone that are more predicated of Africa as the logical mentality is predicated of the Western world. This will appeal to quite a few people who place respectability before pragmatism in education.

The ‘problem approach’ methodology when it informs the orientation of Religious Education Departments will transform the course content. The first step will be to solve a problem identifiable in the Nigerian Society. One that easily comes to mind is the growing tendency to Religious extremism. This is manifested, among other ways, in the activism which may range from a loudspeaker evangelism at the most inoccuous periods of the day to the rapidity to burn churches and mosques at the earliest opportunity. The next step is to intellectualize this problem in terms of the causes. The third is to propose a solution. The attempt should be made in shaping the course content of religious studies to promote tolerance among the recipients or graduates who are most likely to hold responsible positions in the society after graduation. Thus besides some necessary courses already earmarked above, other courses such as to promote Christian-Muslim interaction will be opportuned. In addition, themes such as ‘conversion, and the impact of nascent Christian churches such as the Aladura will be useful as well as ground in the various traditional religions and cosmologies.

Until and unless the orientation to policy formulation in education, in developing
countries, is problem-solving, education as a discipline will remain yet another bread and butter exercise. Its enormous potential for social engineering will remain undeveloped. Its graduates will be intelligent reciters of educational practises and exercises which were responses to past ages of people of different cultural milieux. Our society will be the worse for it.

REFERENCE


Ibid 1977, p. 118

