Comparative Analysis in Education

Dr Ellen Boeren (Course Organiser)

Credit Rating 20 credits, SCQF 11

Course Description
The course aims to provide student with a comprehensive overview of the theories and methodologies used in comparative education research.

It includes an overview on:-
(1) the models and frameworks used to define comparative education
(2) the tools available for sampling and measuring within comparative education
(3) the research methodologies applied to conduct comparative research

The course will enable students to critically evaluate the soundness of research in the field of comparative education.

The course will consist of ten lectures and will balance between lecturing and specific practical exercises in class.

Phase 1
The first few sessions will mainly focus on aims, theories and models of comparative education, including the core definitions of comparative education and the mainstream comparative models. Differences between international and comparative education as comparative education does not automatically refer to international education. It refers to comparisons between groups, but also to comparisons over time.

We will work on examples of comparative education, such as journal articles that contain a comparative element. A range of articles will be chosen in order to reflect the differences as discussed in the models and classifications.
Phase 2
Having introduced the core definitions and models, we will focus on the importance of the sample and of selection the groups to be compared in the comparative research. Several tools to inform the sample selection will be discussed, such as the role of welfare typologies in order to select countries, the concept of statistical neighbours to explore similar or different counties, provinces or Local Authorities, the role of school and university rankings, tools available to classify workplaces and industries, time will also be used to focus on the importance of standardised measurements and concepts. We will discuss the need for formulating concepts that will be understood in the different selected groups. Also, we will discuss standardised measurements and coding schemes used in comparative research. Examples include the ISCED classification, the Goldthorpe class schema, the ISCO-88 classification, standardised achievement tests.

Comparative education does not only refer to comparing between groups, but also to comparing the same groups over time. During this session, we will explore various existing longitudinal studies in the field of education, and will focus on various types including case studies, life course perspective studies, birth cohort studies and biographical studies.

Phase 3
As a last phase within this course, students will work towards undertaking research, starting with focussing on research aims, objectives and questions. Students will work in small groups and will chose a research topic, formulate research questions, and defend the choice of their sample. Examples of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods studies in comparative education. Based on journal articles, three different types of studies will be introduced, analysed and discussed. Core work by Ragin the comparative method: moving beyond quantitative and qualitative research will be used as a core guidance within this session. We will also work on research design and methods. We will be also discuss a range of comparative analytical techniques, including t-tests and ANOVAs for quantitative research, and the qualitative comparative method for qualitative research. Existing research examples will be explore.

Learning Outcomes
On completion of this course, students will be able to:

- at the end of the course, students should be able to critically analyse the key challenges and issues of conducting comparative education research
- at the end of the course, students should be able to critically analyse the major streams, models and classifications used in comparative education research
- at the end of the course, students should be able to critically analyse the tools available for sampling and measuring in comparative education research
- at the end of the course, students should be able to design sound research questions and designs that can be used in comparative research methods
- at the end of the course, students should be able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of research published in the field of comparative education
Teaching
The course has 25 hours of contact teaching time. This will be delivered in ten 2.5 hour classes.

Successful participation in the course will require not only attendance at the weekly sessions, but also work in your own time - pre-session reading, preparation for sessions, additional reading, and time spent thinking about the ideas raised on the course. It is particularly important that students prepare for workshops, particularly when presentations are being made. Those who have not prepared may be asked to leave the workshop.

Course Assessment
Students will have to assess a piece of research in the field of comparative and international research. The course organiser will make a selection of publications that recently appeared in the leading journals in the field (e.g. Globalisation, Societies and Education; Compare; Comparative Education, but also psychological and sociological education journals). Students will be asked to engage in a critical evaluation of the research methods used, as well as to demonstrate their critical reflection on the models and frameworks used across the sessions of the course.

The word limit is 4,000 words (excluding references). Please refer to the Generic MSc Handbook for guidelines on the preparation and presentation of assessments, and for full details of the marking criteria.

Course Content
Session 1: Aims, theories and models of comparative education
Apart from setting out the learning objectives for the entire course, the first session will be used to introduce and discuss the core definitions of ‘comparative’ education and the mainstream comparative models such as Lor’s Comparative Research Design Model (variable versus case oriented designs), Theisen and Adams’ Classification of Comparative Research (analytical, descriptive, evaluative and exploratory) and Bray and Thomas’ Comparative Framework (see Figure below).

The first session will be used to explain the differences between international and comparative education as comparative education does not automatically refer to international education. It refers to comparisons between groups, but also to comparisons over time.

Session 2: Examples of comparative education: applying Session 1
In the second session, we will analyse journal articles that contain a comparative element. A range of articles will be chosen in order to reflect the differences as discussed in the models and classifications in Session 1. Group work will be used to analyse specific articles in-depth, and to present the results of group work to the rest of the group.
Session 3: Comparative tools for sample selection
In this session, we will focus on the importance of selecting the groups to be compared in the comparative research. Several tools to inform the sample selection will be discussed, such as the role of welfare typologies in order to select countries, the concept of statistical neighbours to explore similar or different counties, provinces or Local Authorities, the role of school and university rankings, tools available to classify workplaces and industries, …

Session 4: Standardised measurements and concepts
This session will be used to focus on the importance of formulating concepts that will be understood in the different selected groups. Also, we will discuss standardised measurements and coding schemes used in comparative research. Examples include the ISCED classification, the Goldthorpe class schema, the ISCO-88 classification, standardised achievement tests. This session will therefore reflect on issues such as validity and reliability.

Session 5: Comparing over time
Comparative education does not only refer to comparing between groups, but also to comparing the same groups over time. During this session, we will explore various existing longitudinal studies in the field of education, and will focus on various types including case studies, life course perspective studies, birth cohort studies and biographical studies.

Session 6: Research aims, objectives and questions
In this session, students will work in small groups and will choose a research topic, formulate research questions, and defend the choice of their sample. Practical guidelines will be introduced to enable structured presentations during the final part of the workshop.

Session 7: Examples of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods studies in comparative education
Based on journal articles, three different types of studies will be introduced, analysed and discussed. Core work by Ragin ‘the comparative method: moving beyond quantitative and qualitative research’ will be used as a core guidance within this session.

Session 8: Research design and methods
In this session, students will return to their Session 6 groups and will expand their research project, introducing a sound research design and method in order to answer their research questions.

Session 9: Examples of comparative analysis
Session 9 will be used to introduce and discuss a range of comparative analytical techniques, including t-tests and ANOVA’s for quantitative research, and the qualitative comparative method for qualitative research. Existing research examples will be explored.

Session 10: Open session
The last session will be used to revise the previous nine sessions and to answer remaining questions of students, and to provide answers and detailed information regarding the final assignment.
Readings

Indicative resources – examples of key texts and other resources


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