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Comparative education and gender

Abstract: The purpose of the article is to present the importance of gender studies in comparative education and the role of female scientists in its development. The first part of the text is devoted to the phenomenon of the gradually increasing comparative interest in the issue of gender, both in the research and teaching contexts. Then two basic theoretical approaches to the analysis of gender in comparative education are presented, in the context of the issue of inequality: direct gender inequality and structural inequality (gender, class, race). Both of the approaches are illustrated with examples of research and publications. In the second part of the text, an attempt is made to present the role of women as researchers in the development and organisation of comparative education, with regard to scientific work and holding positions in international associations of comparative education. The article is intended as a contribution to understanding the phenomenon of expanding the problem field of comparative education.

Keywords: comparative education, gender, theoretical approaches, women's contribution.

Introduction

In her 2014 text 'Thinking about Gender in Comparative Education', Elaine Unterhalter writes that 'the history of gender research in comparative education can be perceived as a series of actions relating to [breaking] the silence' that was present in the subdiscipline (2014, p. 115).

An in-depth discussion on gender, aimed at broadening the problem field of comparative education, was initiated, according to the author cited above, relatively recently, in three special issues of such prestigious

journals as 'Harvard Educational Review' (1979), 'Comparative Education Review' (1980) and 'Comparative Education' (1987) (Unterhalter, 2014, p. 115). In turn, the authors of the introduction to the 2004 special issue of the journal 'Comparative Education Review', devoted to comparative studies on women's education, stated that their goal was both to analyse the 'barriers to educational access' and to address the question to what extent 'increased educational attainment among girls and women has (or has not) led to changes in the social construction of gender roles and in the economic and political participation of women (and men) in local, national, and international communities in the context of global forces'. (Assie'-Lumumba and Sutton, 2004, p. 349). However, according to Elaine Unterhalter, unlike in the broadly understood social sciences and humanities, gender issues 'have had less of a resonance in comparative and international education than would be expected' (2014, p. 118).

The situation in this regard has been fundamentally changing with each decade. Nowadays, comparative studies and publications on gender form an integral part of the problem field of comparative education. Numerous books and hundreds of articles are published annually on the participation of women and men in education – in a comparative context. Also, texts regarding this issue appear systematically in major comparative journals such as the aforementioned 'Comparative Education', 'Comparative Education Review' or 'Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education.' Chapters on gender issues can also be found in almost all major pedagogical encyclopaedias of comparative education, as well as in textbooks for classes on comparative education at universities. In addition, such chapters can be found in books comparing societies or cultures of different countries.

A number of excellent universities have subjects devoted exclusively to the various gender aspects of comparative research in education. I would mention here, for example: 'Gender and Education in Global and Comparative Perspectives' (Stanford University), 'Gender and Higher Education in a Comparative Perspective' (University of Oslo), 'Comparative and International Perspectives on Gender and Education Policy and Practice' (University of Toronto) and 'Gender, Education and International Development' (University of Pittsburgh). In other cases, modules on gender issues constitute an essential part of programmes related to comparative education.

Theoretical contexts of gender studies in comparative education

The content analysis of selected (possibly representative) texts relating to gender studies in comparative education allows to formulate certain conclusions and to make some reflections.

The fundamental concern in comparative gender education studies relates to the problem of (in)equality. It has a great number of dimensions, however, it refers primarily to the access by women and men in the broadest sense, both to a particular form of consciousness/identity and to a particular type of institutionalised form or level of education. In this regard, comparative analyses of the problem of gender (in)equality in education usually refer to one of two approaches (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2011, p. 36-37).

The first is referred to as the theory of (direct gender hierarchy). Its essence is the belief of male dominance in society and discrimination against women. The core categories involved are gender equality and gender inequality. It is assumed that male dominance and the resulting forms of inequality are structural. Inherent to the present approach is the belief that women and men are 'competing groups with different opportunities' to achieve status and success; including education. In this tradition, the categories of masculinity and femininity are static and internally integrated (occasionally even the different nature of men and women is invoked in reference to biological determinism) (Holter, 2005, p. 17). This approach opposes men and women as social groups antagonistic to each other. It is worth giving examples of publications that directly correspond to this concept: 'Standardised Education and Gender Differences in Mathematics Achievement: A Comparative Study' (Ayalon and Livneh, 2013), 'Gender Stereotypes and Education: A Comparative Content Analysis of Malaysian, Indonesian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi School Textbooks' (Islam I Asadullah, 2018), 'Educational Gender Inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Long-Term Perspective' (Baten, de Haas, Kempter I Meier zu Selhausen, 2021), 'The Challenge of Ensuring Gender Equality in Vietnamese and English High Schools: Espoused and Real Commitments' (Brundrett I Dung, 2018), 'Hidden Transcripts: The Micropolitics of Gender in Commonwealth Universities' (Morley, 2006).

What is often used in the approach based on the idea of direct gender hierarchy are also various, sometimes metaphorical, categories and concepts in comparative study to help explain the phenomenon of discrimination against women. The metaphor of the 'glass ceiling' is used to describe the phenomenon of social mechanisms (blockages) that prevent women from using the educational diplomas, competencies and qualifications they possess in their careers (Purcell, Macarthur and Samblanet, 2010). The glass

ceiling symbolises the visibility of potential promotion and simultaneously its impossibility. In turn, the 'sticky floor' (or 'sticky web') metaphor refers to the 'entrapment of women', regardless of their education, in low-prestige professional positions, with no opportunity for promotion; in particular, referring to women from ethnic minorities. On the other hand, the term 'glass escalator' refers to the situation of rapid, unwarranted promotion of men in professions usually dominated by women (Titkow, 2003, p. 8-10). Excellent examples of the use of said categories in comparative studies with their in-depth educational context are publications that demonstrate the unequal opportunities for women to use their education in the labour market, in their careers; for example: 'The Glass Ceiling Hypothesis. A Comparative Study of the United States, Sweden, and Australia' (Baxter I Wright, 2000), 'Academe's Glass Ceiling: Societal, Professional-Organizational, and Institutional Barriers to the Career Advancement of Academic Women' (Bain and Cummings, 2000), 'Glass Ceiling and Women Employees in Asian Organizations: a Tri-Decadal Review' (Lathabhavan and Balasubramanian, 2017), as well as'Breaking the Glass Ceiling Philosophy and Reality: A Study of Gender Progress and Career Development in the Corporate World' (Itty, Garcia, Futterman, Austt, & Mujtaba, 2019), 'The Gender Wage Gaps, 'Sticky Floors' and 'Glass Ceilings' of the European Union' (Christofides, Polycarpou and Vrachimis, 2013).

With women's access to all levels of education increasing (or even equalising) in most countries of the world, and in some gaining a statistical advantage over men in numerous fields of study (as early as 2008, Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin wrote about the 'reversal of gender inequality' in this area) (2008), the concept of direct gender hierarchy is beginning to have less relevance in comparative studies. The alternative theory, which has recently begun to prevail in comparative education, attempts to look for 'general trends in discrimination or inequality and their causes, but not necessarily those related to gender hierarchy per se' (Holter, 2005). Gender inequality is analysed here through the lens of broader problems of social stratification. This approach assumes that gender forms only one context of inequality, and that class, racial, or ethnic affiliation is equally important. I would add, however, that critics of this approach point out that, as Ø. Gullvåg Holter states, 'structures of structural inequality are often relatively hidden and difficult to recognise, especially when they appear to be gender-neutral in nature' (2005, p. 18).

Notwithstanding this criticism, however, such a multidimensional approach is playing an increasingly important role, as has been previously written. Liz Jackson writes that until recently, race, class and gender were - with regard to studies in the spheres of education and social life - usually studied in isolation from each other. In doing so, she cites approvingly Mark Mason's view that in 'comparative educational studies', analysis of educational reality *through* categories of homogeneous boy/girl and male/female groups should be abandoned. Instead, comparativists should consider 'the importance of race, class, and gender as factors which are distinguishable but nevertheless while they interact with each other in a variety of ways that shape the access and achievement of individuals' (Jackson, 2014, p. 213-214).

Such an approach creates a less conclusive picture, in which the woman, as a subordinate person because of her *femininity*, can at the same time be dominant because of her *race* (white race) or *ethnicity*; or conversely. The question then arises, for example, how does the mutual relationship of dominance/subordination between a female white lawyer and a male black ethnic minority worker proceed?

However, this does not mean that the gender binarism approach to comparative analysis has become a thing of the past. And so, in recent times, there have been numerous comparative studies on the differences in scientific productivity between men and women at the higher education level, along with attempts to explain the causes of the 'gender gap' taking place in this sphere. And here women and men are perceived as two distinct homogeneous groups (Aiston and Jung, 2015). Similarly, there are studies relating to the citation structure of scientific publications by women and men, containing asymmetry - always in favour of male authors (Maliniak, Powers and Walter, 2013).

It should be added that many macro-statistical comparisons of various aspects of education still capture the female population as a homogeneous whole and compare it with the male group, as assumed in the concept of direct gender hierarchy. These comparisons concern, for example, the access of women and men to certain types of schooling or fields of study. However, this type of macro-comparative procedure does not exhaust the issue. This is because it blurs the phenomenon of differential access to education for women and men - depending on social group or class, or ethno-racial group. In fact, in many highly developed countries, women from the upper classes have already achieved equality, both educationally and socially, while various forms of inequality still extend to women (but also men) from underprivileged classes - workers, peasants, or ethnic minorities. As a result, it seems

that sex/gender is no longer the main criterion for advancing the principle of equality of educational opportunities or educational outcomes today. Divisions in this regard relate much more to social background. In other words, educational inequality (and also social inequality) is constructed according to class, social group, or ethno-racial group (as well as along urban-rural lines, or by region), and to a lesser extent according to the gender division: women-men (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2011, p. 19-37).

And this is the approach which is beginning to occur with increasing frequency in contemporary comparative education. Examples of the following comparative publications can be given here: 'Education, Ethnicity, Gender, and Social Transformation in Israel and South Africa' (Mickelson, Nkomo, and Smith, 2001), 'Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes and the Effect of Family Background: A Comparative Perspective from East Asia' (it features a comparison of Japan and China with the United States in this regard) (Akabayashi, Nozaki, Yukava and Li, 2020), 'Comparing Race, Class, and Gender' (with reference to comparative research in education) (Jackson, 2014), 'Who Goes to School? Educational Stratification by Gender, Caste, and Ethnicity in Nepal' (Stash and Hannum, 2001).

Notwithstanding the growing prevalence of the second approach outlined above, it seems reasonable to conclude that each of these approaches can be used in comparative studies as well and complementarily. For in some dimensions, or countries/societies or local communities, the dividing lines in access to various forms of socialisation and identity, as well as education and the labour market (careers) still run along gender divisions. In other situations, on the other hand, it seems that it is class, racial or ethnic background that determines that access.

Already from the above considerations, two approaches to comparative research in education with regard to gender issues emerge. Either of them is diagnostic-analytical in nature and its purpose is to obtain, based on specific criteria and research methods used, knowledge of a selected phenomenon or issue. The results obtained often become a point of action taken within the framework of educational policy. For it should be added that the focus on educational change was one of the developmental dynamics of comparative education; Justin J. W. Powell writes about 'the potential of improving education systems by understanding them better through comparison', with educational transfer being a 'continuosfeature of comparative and international education.' It represents 'a process in which a local problemis recognised, solutions to similar challenges found in other countries

are identified.' Occasionally known as the 'politics of educational borrowing' (Powell, 2020, p. 60).

However, within comparative education, there also exists, in relation to gender, an orientation towards values and sometimes even adoption of a very explicit ideological stance. In such cases, we are dealing with research based on premises of fighting against gender injustice and inequality, wherein education is supposed to take on the role of a catalyst. Publications in this area are often saturated with emotion, which permeates intellectual considerations. Several examples in this regard are worth mentioning; with the most typical ones make a relation between feminism and comparative education: 'Liberal Feminism in Comparative Education and the Implications for Women's Empowerment' (Omwami 2020), 'Liberal Feminism, Cultural Diversity and Comparative Education' (Enslin and Tjiattas, 2004), 'Contributions and Challenges of Feminist Theory to Comparative Education Research and Methodology' (Stromquist, 2003) or the book summarising the comparative-educational thought of Gail Kelly, 'International Feminist Perspectives on Educational Reform' (1996). In all the texts linking feminism and comparative education, the dominant idea is that comparative research should become one of the sources of profound educational change, based on the idea of gender and social justice.

From my own perspective, what appears as particularly interesting are those studies that compare the situation of women, also in the educational context, against the background of their social roles in culturally radically different countries. An example here is the collection of texts published in 2022, 'Comparative Perspectives on Gender Equality in Japan and Norway. Same but Different?' (Ishii-Kuntz, Kristensen and Ringrose, 2022). In this book, education constitutes one of the areas of comparative research, along with family, career, sexuality and media representation. Another similar example, in a 2019 text, refers to a comparison of the social, including educational, situation of women and men in Turkey and Sweden: 'Measuring Gender Equality. A Comparative Analysis of Sweden and Turkey' (Aslan and Doğanay 2019). As in other works in this category, the analyses here are oriented towards the different socialisation and stratification mechanisms in the two countries.

Comparative studies on the situation of women (including access to education) in less diverse cultural settings are also extremely intriguing, as, for example, in the text on women's identity formation in Islamic communities in India and Indonesia (Soaderwo, Yumitro and Zuriah, 2020). Similar in nature is the book 'Patriarchy in East Asia. A Comparative Sociology of

Gender' on Japanese, Korean and Chinese women (Sechiyama, 2013), where various socialisation and stratification dimensions of education are pointed out - in the context of gender.

Women's contribution to the development of comparative education

The second part of my work, intended as complementary to the first, addresses the share of women among researchers in the field of comparative education. In 2020, the book 'North American Scholars of Comparative Education. Examining the Work and Influence of Notable 20th Century Comparativists', was published, which presented scientific profiles of 16 most prominent comparative educators of the previous century. Among them were three women: Mary Jean Bowman, Gail Paradise Kelly and Heidi Anna Ross. They were listed among such undisputed classics of comparative education as, for example, Isaac Kandel, George Beredey and Ronald Paulston (Epstein, 2020).

Mary Jean Bowman (1908-2002) received her PhD from the University of Harvard. As a professor at the University of Chicago, she studied the relationship between education and economics, and published (also in collaboration with the university's Comparative Education Center) a number of significant texts on the application of human capital theory to research and education. Together with Arnold C. Anderson, she edited the book titled Education and Economic Development (1965); her major works include: 'Educational Choices and Labour Market in Japan' (1981); she also wrote a number of texts on education and economics in Africa.

In turn, Gail Paradise Kelly (1940-1991) was one of the leading representatives of the feminist approach to research in comparative education. Among others, together with Phillip Altbach, she edited the book 'New Approaches to Comparative Education' (1986), which included many texts by prominent representatives of this sub-discipline of education, previously published in the 'Comparative Education Review'. In addition, she edited, together with Robert F. Arnove and Phillip Albach, the book 'Emergent Issues in Education. A Comparative Perspective' (1992). In the field of comparative education, her main interest was the education of women in Third World countries. With Phillip Altbach she edited the book 'Education and Colonialism' (1978), and with Carolyn M. Elliot, 'Women's Education in the Third World. A Comparative Perspective' (1978) and with Sheila Slaughter, 'Women's Higher Education in Comparative Perspective' (1981). She also published many articles on the subject, such as 'Failures of Androcentric Studies of Women's Education in the Third World.' From 1986 to 1988 she

was vice president and then president of 'The Comparative and International Education Society.' Also, was editor of the 'International Handbook of Women's Education.'

The last of the vital female figures in comparative education I mentioned above, Heidi Ross (1954-2016) was a professor of Educational Policy Studies and Director of the East Asian Studies Center at Indiana University. In 2001, she was elected president of 'The Comparative and International Education Society'; she was also co-editor of 'Comparative Education Review' for a brief period. She wrote a number of significant works on Chinese education; including the book 'China Learns English. Language Teaching and Social Change in the People's Republic' (1993), or the articles 'Glocalizing Chinese Higher Education: Groping for Stones to Cross the River' (2005), 'Educating Girls as Community Leaders: Contradictions in one Spring Bud Project in Rural Shaanxi, China' (2008, with L. Wang). In addition, she is the author of a number of texts on the use of qualitative methodology in comparative research; among others, she is co-editor of the book 'The Ethnographic Eye: Interpretive Studies of Education in China' (2000).

In turn, the compendium edited by David Phillips published in 2020, 'British Scholars of Comparative education. Examining the Work and Influence of Notable 19th and 20th Century Comparativists', which incorporates the texts of the most important British comparativists (including Michael Sadler and Brian Holmes) features one woman - Margaret Sutherland (1920-2011) (Phillips, 2020). In the 1970s, she was Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Leeds. She also served as president of the 'British Association for International and Comparative Education' and the 'World Association of Educational Research' as well as played an active role in the 'Association Francophone d'Education Comparee'. Her main interest in the field of comparative education related to various issues of the relationship between gender and education, including the perception of their careers by women working at universities in different countries of the world. In this regard, she published 'Women who Teach in Universities' (1985), a book on female academics in Finland, East Germany, the United Kingdom and Germany. She is also the author of 'Sex Bias in Education' (1981), 'Theory of Education' (1988), 'Femmes et éducation. Politiques nationales et variations internationes' (with Claudine Baudoux) (1994), and author of such texts as, among others: 'Comparative Education and Literature', 'The Role of Women in Higher Education' (1985), 'Whatever happened about coeducation' (1985), 'Gender Equity in Success at School' (1999); 'Raising and Falling: Comparative Education and Teaching and Research in Scotland'. From 1975

to 1985 she was editor of the 'British Journal of Educational Studies'. The importance of this figure in the recent history of education is evidenced by the establishment of the 'Margaret Sutherland Prize in Comparative Education' - a biennial award presented by the 'Comparative Education Society in Europe' for an outstanding comparative publication for a woman in the earlier stages of her academic career.

One has to mention also the most prominent comparativists in Polish education. Anna Mońka-Stanikowa (1907-2007), who headed the Department of Comparative Education of the Faculty of Education at the University of Warsaw, is the author of the books: 'Schooling in Modern Belgium' (pl. 'Szkolnictwo w Belgii współczesnej') (1963), 'Swiss Schooling in Light of Contemporary Educational Tendencies' (pl. 'Szkolnictwo szwajcarskie w świetle współczesnych tendencji oświatowych') (1970), and 'Secondary Schooling in Western Countries' (pl. 'Szkoła Średnia w krajach zachodnich') (1976). In turn, Eugenia Potulicka, for many years head of the Department of Comparative Education of the Faculty of Educational Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University and president of the Polish Society of Comparative Education, made a huge contribution to the development of Polish comparative education in the form of such publications as: 'University Remote Education in Western Countries' (pl. 'Uniwersytecka edukacja zdalna w krajach zachodnich') (1988), 'The Origins of the 1988 Education Reform in England and Wales' (pl. 'Geneza reformy edukacji w Anglii i Walii z roku 1988') (1993), 'Neoliberal Education Reforms in the United States. From Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama' (pl. 'Neoliberalne reformy edukacji w Stanach Zjednoczonych. Od Ronalda Reagana do Baracka Obamy') (2014), 'Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the United States' (pl. 'Edukacja mniejszości rasowych i etnicznych w Stanach Zjednoczonych') (2016), 'Two Paradigms of Thinking about Education and its Reforms: Pedagogical and Global-Neoliberal' (pl. 'Dwa paradygmaty myślenia o edukacji i jej reformach: pedagogiczny i globalny-neoliberalny') (2019); she co-edited the book 'Education Systems in European Countries' (pl. 'Systemy edukacji w krajach europejskich') (2013). Renata Nowakowska-Siuta, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Christian Academy of Theology, chairwoman of the Team for International Comparative Studies of the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN), is the author, among others, of such significant comparative publications as: 'The University in the German Higher Education System against a European Comparative Background' (pl. 'Uniwersytet w systemie szkolnictwa wyższego Niemiec na europejskim tle porównawczym') (2005), 'Comparative Education. Problems, state of research and

prospects for development' (pl. 'Pedagogika porównawcza. Problemy, stan badań i perspektywy rozwoju') (2014), 'Romantic and Pragmatic. The Idea of German Neohumanist University and its Social Implications' (pl. 'Romantyczny i pragmatyczny. Idea niemieckiego uniwersytetu neohumanistycznego i jej społeczne implikacje') (2018), 'On Education in Finland. A Study in Comparative Education' (pl. 'O edukacji w Finlandii. Studium z pedagogiki porównawczej') (2021), 'Rationality of the Educational Process. A Study in Educational Policy and Comparative Pedagogy' (pl. 'Racjonalność procesu kształcenia. Studium z polityki oświatowej i pedagogiki porównawczej') (co-authored with B. Śliwerski, 2015).

In 1998, Erwin H. Epstein, a well-known American educator and comparative director of The Center for Comparative Education at Loyola University Chicago, presented, on the pages of 'Comparative Education Review,' the results of his analysis of a comparison of the number of texts published by women and men in the journal between 1957 and 1997. It turns out that since 1978, the number of female authors has been increasing, and in 1995 it reached 45.7% of the authorship of the total number of texts (Epstein, 1998). In 2016, on the contrary, American comparativist Patricia Bromley (from the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity at the University of Stanford) conducted a 'research project' during her classes in the subject 'Introduction to International and Comparative Education' - in order to 'analyse longitudinal changes' in the content of the journal 'Comparative Education Review', between 1957 and 2016. Among other things, this project involved an analysis of the profile of authors of articles published in the journal. The individual chapters of the report were prepared by the project participants. It was found that - in a selected sample of 59 issues of the journal from said period - in the case of the first co-author, the authors of 211 articles in said period were men and 61 were women; while with regard to the second co-author, 41 were men and 28 were women. Thus, the asymmetry in favour of men is very clear at this point, although it has been decreasing decade by decade, and in the 21st century there has already begun to appear a balance in this regard (Coelho, Gavrila, Khoo, & Mendoza, 2016, p. 99, 101).

Women are also now sitting on the governing bodies of comparative education societies and organisations. Susan Robertson of the University of Cambridge is president (elect - 2023-2024) of the 'Comparative and International Education Society' and Halla Holmarsdottir of Oslo Metropolitan University is vice-president of the latter institution (2023-2024); the secretary and treasurer are also women (CIES, 2023). The vice presidents of the 'Comparative Education Society in Europe' are Terry Kim of the University

College of London and Cathryn Mango of the University of Fribourg (CESE, 2023). Finally, the position of president of the 'World Council of Comparative Education Societies' is held by N'Dri T. Assié-Lumumba of Cornell University (WCCES, 2023).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to say that in the historical perspective, we can speak of the growing importance of the problem field concerning the study of gender within comparative education (using a variety of theoretical approaches and concepts) and the role of women as comparativists - both in a strictly scientific context and in terms of the organisation of science. Thus, it can be stated, following Elaine Unterhalter, that the 'comparative potential of gender as an analytical or normative idea and its articulation within education' (2014, p. 112) is being used increasingly in comparative education.

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