

*Full Length Research paper*

# Students' expectations of and motivations for studying comparative education: A comparative study across nine countries in North America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America

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The aim of this research was to determine what comparative education students expect from comparative education courses. Students from nine countries in North America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America were surveyed. These countries were the United States of America, Ireland, Greece, Bulgaria, Oman, Thailand, Tanzania, South Africa and Cuba. The results showed startling differences regarding students' perceptions of and motivations for studying comparative education. Their diverse motivations, the study concludes, are linked to contextual factors. In conclusion the implications of these findings for comparative education course curricula, for the conceptualization of the significance of comparative education, and for the comparative education research agenda are highlighted.

**Keywords:** Comparative education, teacher education, student teachers, education systems, curricula.

## INTRODUCTION

For over the past five decades, comparative education theorists have continued to define and redefine the field of Comparative Education and speculate about its future viability (Yang, 1993; Rust, 2002; Manzon, 2011). As the range of definitions demonstrate, the field is diverse,

fluid, and responsive to global shifts and needs. It also holds a precarious position at universities world-wide. In many parts of the world comparative education courses have been abolished during recent decades (Wolhuter et al., 2008). The purpose of this study was to examine students' expectations of comparative education classes as a means to strengthen comparative education programs worldwide. Ultimately, in this article it is argued that the future of comparative education depends upon

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the rise of a new generation of comparativists, which in turn depends upon the extent to which students find comparative education courses meaningful.

Epstein and Carroll (2005, p. 62) characterized Comparative Education as an “eclectic/diverse field with adjustable borders and contours which are difficult to demarcate”, while Cowen (2000, p. 333) goes so far as to state that there is no single or unified “Comparative Education”, but that there are multiple comparative educations. Diversity exists along a multitude of dimensions (Wolhuter, 2008): levels of analysis (Bray and Thomas, 1998); single-double-multiple unit studies; geographical foci; diversity; institutional affiliation of comparativists (Cook et al., 2004); methodological diversity (Rust et al., 1999); paradigmatic variety (Paulston 1977, 1994, 1997, 1999); phase of education (primary, secondary, higher); mode of education (formal, non-formal, informal); and themes focused upon.

Ever-since Kazamias’ (1972) 1972 CIES (Comparative and International Education Society) presidential address, concern has been raised about the absence of the forceful rise of a new young generation of comparativists to take over the baton from the old guard (Weeks et al., 2006, p.16). The future of Comparative Education depends upon the emergence of a new generation of comparativists, which in turn depends upon the extent to which students find Comparative Education courses meaningful. O’Sullivan et al (2008) research, comparison between Irish and South African students’ motivations for and expectations of comparative education courses revealed that such motivations and expectations could be very divergent and highly context-related. Complementing that study with more cases could, therefore provide further useful insights.

### **Purpose of Research**

The aim of this research was to determine what comparative education students expect from comparative education courses, as a first step towards placing students’ expectations on the comparative education research agenda. In order to explicate the role of contextual forces (contextual forces are taken to include both national societal forces as well as international forces such as the impact of globalization) in shaping students’ expectations, students’ expectations in nine countries (which included both Northern and Southern countries; and countries from all the major world regions: North-America, Latin America, Western Europe, Mediterranean Europe, Eastern Europe, the Islamic countries, Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia) were surveyed. The countries included the United States of America, Ireland, Greece, Bulgaria, Cuba, Tanzania, South Africa, Oman, and Thailand.

Subsequently the theoretical lens is presented, followed by a portrayal of the contextual background – the position of Comparative Education at universities in each of these countries is discussed, followed by an explanation of the research methodology. Then the results are presented and discussed.

### **Theoretical lens**

Comparative Education scholars have been writing on the purposes of Comparative Education regularly (King, 1965; Larsen ed., 2010; Manzon, 2011, pp.174-177). Wolhuter (2011) distinguishes between a number of functions which the field of Comparative Education could fulfil. These relate to descriptive functions, interpretive functions, evaluative functions, applications to serve educational reform, application to improve teaching practice, application to serve other scholarly fields of Education, and philanthropic functions.

### **Description**

The most basic utility of comparative education is to describe education systems/learning communities, within their societal contexts, in order to satisfy the yearning for knowledge which is sui-generis part of human nature. Bereday (1964, p.5) puts it that; “The foremost justification for Comparative Education is intellectual. (Humans) study Comparative Education because they want to know”.

### **Understanding: Interpretation/Explanation**

On the next plane Comparative Education also satisfies the need to understand: education systems in learning communities are explained or understood from surrounding contextual forces which shape them. Conversely – if education systems are shaped by the societal matrix in which they are embedded (and if education systems, in turn, shape societies and cultures), then the comparative study of education systems also fosters an understanding of cultures or societies. Noah’s (1986:156-157) thesis of “education as touch stone of society” is relevant here. The value of Comparative Education is very topical in times of multicultural societies and of Intercultural Education.

### **Evaluation**

Thirdly, Comparative Education serves to evaluate education systems: the own education system as well as

universal evaluation of education systems. In an age of a competitive globalised world, the evaluation of the domestic education project assumes even bigger importance – hence the proliferation of studies such as the IEA studies referred to in chapter I, the OECD: PISA (International Programme for the Assessment of Student Achievement) studies, and the international ranking of universities (Wildavsky, 2010:100-140). The universal evaluation entails how well the education systems of the world rise up to the challenges of the twenty-first century world (Steyn and Wolhuter, 2009) as well as an estimation of the limits and the possibilities of the societal effects of education. Examples of the latter are:

- To what extent can education be employed to effect economic growth?
- To what extent can education be used to eradicate unemployment?
- can education effect a democratic culture?
- To what extent does education offer an instrument to effect intercultural tolerance and intercultural sensitivity in a multicultural society?

#### **Application: Education system planning and reform**

Comparative Education is also pursued to design a new education system, to plan education, and to reform education systems, (Steyn and Wolhuter, 2010). In reforming or in improving the education system or in grappling with an educational issue, challenge or problem, one country could benefit from the experience of other systems. When a country faces a particular educational issue or problem, a study of the experience of other countries that once had faced the same problem, could reveal the full extent and implications of the problem and possible contributory causes; and could also suggest possible solutions to the problem. An example is Wolhuter's (2003) publication of the illuminative value of the experience of Germany and other countries which attempted a dual vocational education and training system, for South Africa when she embarked upon such a system.

#### **Application: Improvement of teaching practice**

Recently there have appeared a number of publications proclaiming the value (or potential value) of Comparative Education in assisting the teacher to improve his/her teaching practice (e.g. Bray, 2007, p.15, Planel, 2008). Comparative Education research can assess the track record of particular teaching methods in particular contents. Not the least significance is the value of assisting to improve teaching practice in multicultural classrooms – as Planel (2008) convincingly shows in her comparative study of pedagogy in English and in French

classrooms. Interestingly, research on students' expectations and experiences of Comparative Education courses have revealed that students too looked onto Comparative Education courses to assist them with the improvement of their teaching practice (O'Sullivan et al., 2008).

#### **Application: Serving other fields of Educational Studies**

Comparative Education is also of use to other fields of Educational scholarship (and even beyond, to related fields of social sciences), e.g. for Philosophy of Education, Comparative Education offers a show-case of the track record of the implementation of various philosophies of education in particular places at particular times in history.

#### **The Philanthropic ideal**

The original inspiration source of the scholarly field of Comparative Education, the philanthropic ideal of the time of Jullien remains the most noble cause of Comparative Education. Serving and improving the state of humanity is in the current age of globalization more urgent than ever – i. a. by nurturing a global citizen, equipped with a creative, critical, caring mindset (Scheller and Wolhuter, 2011).

While many theoreticians of Comparative Education have been reflecting on the relevance and significance of the field, thus far a students' perspective has not been encapsulated in the literature on Comparative Education.

#### **Contextual Background**

##### **The United States of America**

According to Khamsi-Steiner (2000), in the spring of 1900, James Russell presented the first ever Comparative Education course in the world at the Teachers College of Columbia University. Following Kandel's pace-setting course at Teachers College, Comparative Education quickly spread to other universities in the USA. Originally taught in the "factors and forces" mode, Comparative Education courses reflected the temperaments of times – including a social science phase in the 1960s, and paradigm diversity in the 1970s. Currently, in the United States of America, comparative education is characterized as a field encouraging international cooperation, peace and understanding (Kubow and Fossum, 2008, p.159). comparative education's goal is to improve the quality of citizens' lives through the sharing of educational know-

ledge, structures and pedagogy with the aim of expanding educational provision and educational quality worldwide (Kubow and Fossum, 2008, p.159).

Comparative Education, however, is currently often missing as a course requirement in many education degree programs at American higher education institutions (Kubow and Fossum, 2008, p. 160). Without this option, it is unlikely that instructors in other Foundations of Education courses will, in the face of many other competing demands on the curriculum and with instructors themselves possibly lacking a firm schooling in Comparative Education, incorporate cross-national, cross-cultural dimensions in their curricula (Kubow and Fossum, 2008, p.160). This stance is supported by evidence that when international perspectives are found in general foundations texts, they are often relegated to one chapter or drawn upon intermittently, "leaving the comparative perspective undefined and unintegrated as a conceptual tool for understanding education" (Kubow and Fossum, 2007, pp. 7-8).

### **The United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland**

In the 1960s, comparative education gained considerable popularity and acceptance as a new and necessary educational discipline at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in England and Ireland (O'Sullivan, 2007, p.31). From the 1970s to 1990s, however, Comparative Education went through a "crisis of confidence" and a period of dramatic decline. Writing in 1990, Holmes stated that only the University of London had a chair of Comparative Education, although the discipline was offered at a further eight British universities (Holmes, 1990: 85). Yet the early 1990s witnessed a resurgence of Comparative Education at universities. The status of Comparative Education in the postgraduate sector, in particular, began to rise again and "it is currently a vibrant field of study" (O'Sullivan, 2007, p. 35). O'Sullivan (2007) suggests that the reasons for this are: the impact of globalization, the development of development education and international education i.e. education in developing countries as a vibrant field of study: advances in information and communicative technology, paradigmatic challenges, and the relative ease of international travel. In Ireland, at Trinity College, and at one of the five colleges of Education in the country where teacher education is offered, Comparative Education (or CIE, as it is also known now) has been taught as an elective from time to time. This depends on the availability of a lecturer with an interest and background in Comparative Education. Comparative elements can also be found in a number of Foundation courses, such as Philosophy of Education and Curriculum Development.

### **Bulgaria**

Comparative Education in Bulgaria commenced in the late nineteenth century within the context of the advent of political independence from Turkey (1878), and the ensuing increasing interaction with Europe and the creation of a Bulgarian national education system (cf. Popov, 2007, pp.85, 96). During the inter-war years (1919-1944) Comparative Education was introduced and developed as a university discipline. It also began to be considered as a science needed for academic life, school practice and education policy formulation.

During the communist regime in Bulgaria, 1944-1989, the development of Comparative Education was stifled by the repressive atmosphere of the totalitarian Communist state. The worldwide perspective of Bulgarian Comparative Education, established before 1944, was restricted to studying the "leading" Soviet educational experience and education in other socialist countries. In the repressive atmosphere, where even a little interest in Western education was considered a crime, Comparative Education pioneer and stalwart, Professor Christo Negenzov, left Sofia University (Popov, 2007, p.105).

In the autumn of 1989 the communist regime in Bulgaria ended. The post-1990 opening-up to the outside world and the academic mobility (of lecturers, students and researchers) bodes well for the future of Comparative Education in Bulgaria. Since 1997, Comparative Education has been introduced as an obligatory discipline in all university teacher education programmes (Popov, 2007:107).

### **Greece**

The rise of comparative education at universities in Greece is closely linked with the fall of the dictatorship (1974) and the subsequent re-institution of democracy in Greece. In the aftermath of the fall of the dictatorship, the Hellenic Teachers' Association actively pursued the raising of the professional status and social standing of teachers by calling for an elevation of the standards of teacher education. In the resulting establishment of University Departments of Education, which replaced the two-year Teacher's Training Colleges; and with Greece and Greek education re-integrating into the international world, comparative education became a regular part of teacher education programmes (Karras, 2008, p.76).

The current forces of globalization and the formation of the European Union (and Greece being part of it) and its implication for education (e.g. the Bologna Declaration and the Lisbon Goals) have given Comparative Education an additional lease of life in teacher education programs at Greek universities. Teacher education programs now include courses such as "Global and

European dimensions of education”, “Educational systems in Europe” and “Globalization, Continuing and Distance Learning Education (Karras, 2008, p.76). In these days, Comparative Education as a university teaching subject and as a field of study, is an area of increasing interest and evolution (Kazamias and Calogiannakis, 2003; Bouzakis, 2005).

## Cuba

The first Comparative Education course taught at a Cuban university was that of Professor Emma Pérez Tellez at the Faculty of Education of the University of Havana, during 1944-1945. Courses were much in the “factors and forces” mold of Kandel and like-minded comparativists (Masson and Torres, 2008, p.187). However, problems such as illiteracy, rural education, the relationship between state and education, private schooling and technical education received attention too. Since the 1970s, with the creation of the Pedagogical Universities, until 1983, Comparative Education was part of the undergraduate programme of teacher education. The courses covered two broad areas:

- The object of study of Comparative Education and historical evolution of Comparative Education
- The education policies and education systems of capitalist socialist and developing countries.

During 1983-1986 a validation process took place and the curriculum changed. Led by Dr. Hector Ferran Toirae, the new Comparative Education was implemented from 1986 to 1994 at the Pedagogical University E.J. Varona. Greater space for individualization was allowed. Added to curriculum was also the study of the Cuban education policy and education system (Masson and Torres, 2008, p.189).

## Tanzania

Comparative Education, as a field of study in Tanzania, dates back to the 1960s – its beginnings has close links with the establishment of the Department of Education at the University College of Dar Es Salaam in 1964 (Anangisye, 2008, p.304). Since the upgrading of this institution to become the University of Dar Es Salaam in 1970, Comparative Education has been visible in several courses: “Contemporary Education in East Africa”, “Philosophy of Education – Comparative Practice”, “Development and Trends in Teacher Education” and “Education in Developing Countries” (Anangisye et al., 2011). According to Anangisye (2008, p. 205) the following imperatives are evident as shaping forces of Comparative Education at the University of Dar Es Salaam:

- Globalization: in today’s interdependent,

interconnected global society, no nation can exist in isolation. Its education is also affected by extra-national forces

- Education and Comparative Education in Tanzania are ideologically driven and informed by the ideology of Socialism and Self-Reliance. Education for Self-Reliance drew on insights from countries in the socialist Bloc.

- Tanzanian scholars who were returning from studies in the West and East, brought with them educational insights which found a place in different curricula of Education studies.

## South Africa

Comparative Education gained a foothold at South African universities during the 1960s (Bergh and Soudien, 2006). It enjoyed not only prominence in Education courses, but also had an institutional infrastructure, which included Departments of Comparative Education and staff exclusively occupied with comparative education, paralleled in very few places in the world (Wolhuter, 1994). In the post-1994 restructuring of teacher education, comparative education fell on hard ground (Wolhuter, 2006; Wolhuter et al., 2008a). In contrast to countries such as Greece (Karras, 2008), Bulgaria (Popov, 2007), where democratization meant a meteoric boost for Comparative Education, it spelled doom for comparative education as a field at South African universities (Weeks et al., 2006). Comparative Education departments at universities have disappeared and very few universities in South Africa still offer comparative education courses under that name (Wolhuter et al., 2008a). The trend is that comparative Education is not studied per se, but subsumed in a variety of themes deemed necessary for teacher education, i.e. comparative education is in the broadening phase, as described above. Here is a visible example of the thrust towards the inclusion of international and global perspectives in curricula referred to earlier. Examples of themes are: justice; democracy and education; human rights education; education; education policy studies; issues in education; and the South African education system (Weeks et al., 2006).

## Oman

In Oman formal education is a fairly recent development. Before 1970 there were only three primary schools in Oman, with 900 male pupils. Since 1970 the government has focused on expanding education. Comparative Education as a field of study is new in Oman, as is the case with formal education. The official introduction of comparative education took place with the opening of

Sultan Qaboos University (the first, and still the only public university in Oman) in 1986. The Department of Foundations and Educational Administration teaches four comparative education courses; two for undergraduate teacher education program and the other two for a customized Bachelor of Educational Administration program. The main aim of Comparative Education teaching is to show “best practices” of “international models”. The four units in the curriculum of the course “Comparative Educational Administration” are: theoretical background of Comparative Education; case studies of educational administration in developed countries; case studies of educational administration in developing countries; and case studies of educational administration in the Arab Gulf States. The other courses have a similar approach of comparing education, whether the education system as a whole or the educational administration of Oman with counterparts in the Gulf Area or internationally (Al-Harhi, 2008).

### Thailand

In October 2007, teacher education reforms were effected; which have been criticized as changing teacher education from the acquisition of theoretical, pedagogical knowledge and critical skills to mere teacher training skills (Thongthew, 2008, p.266). One of the consequences was that there is no longer any room for comparative education courses in teacher education programs. However, comparative education as a course of study is still offered as an elective course at post-graduate level. Ever since 1957, both the formal school curriculum and teacher education curricula have been strongly influenced by educational models in England and the United States of America (Sukonthaman et al., 1995, p.39). At Chulalongkorn University, the main purpose of the post-graduate Comparative Education course is to look into the education system, structures, curricula and teaching practices of especially the American model in order to select and apply innovative lessons to improve the quality of education in Thailand (Thongthew, 2008, p.267). The content comprises three parts:

- Educational systems and issues and pedagogical practices in four Asian countries: Japan, Singapore, China and Korea
- Explanation of how educational systems relate to their societal contexts, and explanation of how education in Thailand is influenced by social changes.
- Comparative Education research methodology.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Data Collection Instrument

The research instrument used was the questionnaire

consisting of closed and open questions, used by Sullivan et al (2008) (see appendix 1). Upon embarking on a course of comparative education, students were asked, in a face to face encounter with their lecturer in class, to complete the questionnaire (as appearing in appendix 1). Respondents were firstly asked what they knew of comparative education. Secondly they were asked why they wanted to study comparative education, and to rank-order the following nine reasons, in order of importance:

- It is exciting
- helps me to get a teaching job abroad
- It is interesting
- It is worthwhile
- To gain knowledge of other education systems
- broaden mind/personal development
- To improve my teaching
- To compare my own country's education system with others
- To compare various education systems

These reasons emerged from a study with a 2003 cohort of students in Ireland (O'Sullivan, 2008). The study concluded that those students' motivations for and expectations of comparative education are highly context-related. There was also an open section including spaces for respondents to comment on the above, and to add supplemental rationales for studying comparative education.

An extension of that study to more countries was therefore judged to have the potential to reveal further insights. Another difference is that the research of this article was also extended to include Comparative Education students who were not student teachers

Finally respondents were asked, what they thought they will learn during the course, and to rank order the following six outcomes in order of importance:

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

In this case too, there was room for respondents to comment on and to add additional motivations.

### Method of recruitment of respondents

The questionnaire was completed by a sample of Comparative Education students in nine countries, at the onset of their course. In order to maximize the role of context (which this study aims to explicate), the countries included Northern as well as Southern countries, and countries from all world regions – North America, Latin America, Mediterranean Europe, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Islamic countries, Sub-Saharan

Africa, and Asia. The first author made use of his contact with colleagues in each of nine countries including all these regions: USA, Ireland, Greece, Bulgaria, Tanzania, South Africa, Oman, Thailand and Cuba. At the commencement of their next cohort of students, these colleagues then asked their students to complete the questionnaire.

### Methods of Data Analysis

Students' responses to the question "What do you know about the field of Comparative Education" were read and coded, thus the main theme with respect to students of each of the nine countries were identified. The rank-orders of responses to the close questions were calculated. The rank-orders of the nine countries covered in the study were compared. These rank-orders derived from a quantitative analysis of the close questions were compared with the answers given in the open questions.

## RESULTS

### What do you know about the field of Comparative Education?

Students' responses to this question are presented in appendix 2.

Students in the USA believed that Comparative Education entails the study of the various education systems of the world and how these had been shaped by societal contextual factors. Most students in Ireland and Tanzania likewise, saw Comparative Education as the study of other systems of education. Omani, Bulgarian and Greek students added that Comparative Education also means a comparison with the home education system. Cuban students' responses too indicated a belief that Comparative Education entails the study of foreign education systems and a comparison of those with the education system of Cuba, and added that in this way the role of the Cuban education system in the formation and development of Cuban culture will be explicated. Students in South Africa and Greece saw this comparison between foreign and home education system which takes place in the field of Comparative Education, as a means to gain knowledge of best practices as to how to improve their own education systems.

### Why study Comparative Education?

The aggregate rank-orders of students from the different countries' reasons for studying Comparative Education are presented in table 1.

### United States of America

In response to the closed question: "Why study Comparative Education?" students rated "to gain knowledge from other education systems" highest, followed by "to compare various education systems" and "broaden mind/personal development". In the open comment section, the value of Comparative Education in helping students in International Development work surfaced as the single biggest motivator. 29% of students specifically stated that an understanding of Comparative Education would help them in International Development. Examples of comments are:

- "I am extremely interested in education in international development and Comparative Education is an important component"
- "Useful and important tool in development work"

Within the overarching theme of international development work, culture as shaping force of education emerged as very important:

- "How education is institutionalized/-delivered/organized in different settings, how culture and politics impact on these systems"
- "Better teachers/educational administrators understand how culture impacts on education".

### Ireland

Enabling them to teach abroad emerged as the most popular reason to study Comparative Education amongst the Irish students. The open section comment highlighted that they were motivated by a desire to develop their teaching capacity and knowledge and understanding of education and equally by an interest in working and living in a different country. Examples of comments:

- "The course will be very informative on finding jobs and what to expect"
- "It will help me if I go abroad as I will have studied other systems"

### Bulgaria

When the responses of the Bulgarian students to the closed questions (cf. table 2) are read with their answer to the question "what do you know of Comparative Education?" (Discussed above), it is clear that the motivations of the Bulgarian students are yet again different from that of the Irish and of the American students. The main motivating factor for the Bulgarian students is to know their own education system. 36% wrote that it would be useful for future teachers to know the Bulgarian education system as well as other edu-

**Table 1.** Why study Comparative Education? Aggregate Rank-orders\* of Students of Various Countries

category \ country	USA	Ireland	Bulgaria	Greece	Cuba	Tanzania	South Africa	Oman	Thailand
Exciting	7	9	9	9	8	9	8	9	3
To help me find a teaching job abroad	9	1	7	7	4	7	9	7	9
Interesting	4	8	7	5	7	8	6	8	4
Worthwhile	5	6	1	6	5	6	7	5	7
To gain knowledge of other systems	1	2	3	1	5	1	1	4	5
Broaden mind/personal development	3	3	6	4	3	3	2	2	1
To improve my teaching	8	7	5	8	9	5	4	1	8
To compare various own education system with others	6	5	2	2	1	2	3	3	2
To compare various education systems	2	4	4	3	1	4	5	6	6

(\*Aggregate rank-orders were calculated as follows: The percentage of students from a particular country who assigned a particular category rank-order 1 was multiplied by 9, the percentage of students who assigned that category rank-order 2 was multiplied by 8, and so on. These were then added up, and these weighted totals were used to derive the aggregate rank-order for each country. This weighting was done in order to accommodate all rankings accorded to all respondents in a single index, while at the same time give weight commensurate with the importance which respondents gave to each factor).

education systems; 13% wrote that they would use the knowledge in their future practice.

### Greece

Students ranked, in the close section, knowledge of other systems first, followed by comparison of Greek education system with others. In the open section it transpires that the motive behind the desire to compare the Greek education system with others was to improve the Greek education system. Examples of open section answers are:

- "to improve our own education system"
- "to get information about what happens in other countries"
- "to help foreign pupils who come from other countries in order to be incorporated better into our education system"

### Cuba

The two main motivations of the Cuban students (cf. table 2) were to compare various education systems, and to

compare their own education system with others. Read together comments on the open section, such as:

- "to improve cultural level"
- "Features of other countries"
- "it is important for the development of society"

as well as with their conceptualization as to what Comparative Education is (as analyzed above), they want to study Comparative Education in order to focus on the societal outcomes of education, education as a shaping force of culture and society, and especially how Cuban society has been shaped and developed by education.

### Tanzania

In contrast to the rather utilitarian motives of the other countries included in this study, Tanzanian students had more detached and purely intellectual motives for studying Comparative Education. In the closed section, knowledge of other systems transpired as the most widespread motivation for studying Comparative Education, followed by comparing various education systems and broadening mind/personal development. This hierarchy was reiterated in the open-ended section, for example:

**Table 2.** What do you think you will learn during the course? Aggregate Rank-orders\* of Students of Various Countries

Country \ Category	USA	Ireland	Bulgaria	Greece	Cuba	Tanzania	South Africa	Oman	Thailand
Teaching strategies from other countries	5	6	3	6	4	4	3	2	1
How to get a job teaching abroad	6	4	6	5	6	6	6	6	6
Different Cultures	3	1	4	4	1	5	5	5	5
Education Systems	2	5	1	1	4	3	2	1	2
Comparisons between education systems	1	2	2	1	3	2	1	4	4
Broaden general knowledge of education	4	2	5	3	2	1	4	3	2

(\*Aggregate rank-orders were calculated as follows: The percentage of students from a particular country who assigned a particular category rank-order 1 was multiplied by 6, the percentage of students who assigned that category rank-order 2 was multiplied by 5, and so on. These were then added up, and these weighted totals were used to derive the aggregate rank-order for each country).

- “I want to understand the education background of different countries in the world”
- “I want to know how education is provided in a country different from ours”
- “To help me to compare how education is provided in different geographical locations”

**South Africa**

Two factors emerged as motivating South African students to study Comparative Education. They yearned for knowledge of other education systems and to compare the South African education system with others (first and second most important reason, cf. table 2), in order to improve the South African education system, as their open section comment indicates, for example:

- “To compare education systems and to 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”
- “To find out what is wrong with our system”

The second factor was to improve the student’s teaching skills:

- “From the different strategies I can learn strategies to improve my own strategy”
- “I need to transform as a teacher because our education system is undergoing transformation”.

The second motivating factor was to improve their own

teaching by obtaining information of teaching practices with a successful track record in other systems.

**Oman**

From the responses of the students of Oman the same two factors as in the case of the South African students emerged, namely to benefit from the experiences of other countries in education; and to improve their own teaching:

- “To attempt to benefit from the experiences of other countries in education”
- To know the differences between educational systems and benefit from them to develop the educational system in our own country”
- “Gain more skills and abilities in teaching”
- “To know educational systems of other countries in order to benefit from them so I can improve my skills in my job for the sake of the pupils benefiting

**Thailand**

In Thailand the questionnaire was completed at Chulalongkorn University, by a cohort of post-graduate students (as explained in the contextual background, above, in Thailand Comparative Education courses exist only at post-graduate level). Students ranked personal development (broadening of mind) as their prime motivation. They added in the open-ended space for this category that they were interested in research designs in

particular. This might be because these students were in the process of exploring research designs for their theses.

### **What do you think you will learn during the course?**

The aggregate rank-orders of students from the various countries' expectations as to what they expect they will learn during the course are presented in table 2.

#### **United States of America**

Students had more than one answer for this last question. First, 41% of students documented an interest in understanding how culture affects education and/or how education affects culture, emphasizing the importance that cultural competence and/or contextualization have come to play in US conceptions of education. This is in keeping with the "internationalization" movement at many American universities, which encourages study abroad and emphasis global themes in the curriculum. Second, 47% of students documented an interest in an increased understanding of the field of Comparative Education. These students expressed a desire to be fluent in Comparative Education discourse – that is to learn about theories and structures of Comparative Education:

- "I think I will learn about the theories and structures of Comparative Education and then use that knowledge in my own research"

Students seem to feel that formal training in the field of Comparative Education will legitimate their international experiences and will give them credibility as professionals in the field. Lastly 41% of students specifically cited an interest in learning about differences in educational systems. Many students alluded to an interest in developing skills in comparing various educational inputs and outputs. This demonstrates an interest in proficiency and transferable expertise.

#### **Ireland**

In Ireland, the order of importance was firstly, different cultures:

- "To learn more about people and their ways, especially if you have a foreign child in your class"
- "As our own culture is becoming more diverse it prepares us for dealing with it and what to expect, e.g. children with little English or racism".

The next two in line were comparison between systems:

- "To see what works and why"
- "to broaden education knowledge"
- "Why systems are set up in this way and about

the "influence of the environment" followed by "how to get a job abroad"

- "To understand different ways of finding and applying for jobs"

#### **Greece**

Greek students considered, in the closed section, knowledge about educational systems as a well as comparisons between these systems as being the most important.

Comments in the open section revealed that the reason for these was to improve the education system of Greece:

- "To improve our educational system"
- "The comparison of educational systems helps to find solutions"
- "To gather useful educational knowledge"
- To see what educational system is more efficient"

#### **Cuba**

In the closed section Cuban students ranked different cultures highest. This was reiterated in their open-section answers, for example:

- "To learn about different cultures"
- This corresponds to their view of Comparative Education (discussed earlier) which focuses on the societal outcomes of education, thus contributing to a fuller understanding of different societies and cultures.

### **DISCUSSION**

This study has revealed divergent conceptualizations, perceptions and expectations of Comparative Education held by students in various national settings, in various programs and at various levels. The data suggests that this rich variety is context-related. In the case of the United States of America, the dominant motive for enrolling in Comparative Education courses are related to international understanding within the context of education as part of international aid. The hierarchy of expectations of the American students might be understood against the background of these students' experience and career plans in international aid. American student expectations may also result from the amount of foreign aid (and education as part thereof) that the United States of America has been engaged in in the past half century, ever since the advent of independence of large parts of the Third World, The Cold War, and the Truman Doctrine.

In the case of Ireland the most important motivation was to help students to find a job to teach abroad. The Irish student teachers were mainly in there early twenties and intended to teach abroad at some stage of their

career. They also indicated that they hoped it would develop their capacities to teach in the newly developing multi-cultural classrooms in Ireland and to also develop their general teaching strategies.

The Greek and South African students looked to Comparative Education to illuminate and to guide the domestic education reform project. Both Greece and South Africa has recently become the scene of fundamental societal reconstruction, of which education is not only an integral part, but in which education had been assigned a pivotal instrumental role to bring about (cf. Wolhuter, 1999).

Bulgarian students' expectations, on the other hand, seem to revolve around gaining of fuller knowledge and insight of their own education system. While undergoing societal and educational transformation as South Africa – Bulgaria as a fully fledged member of the erstwhile Eastern Block, never suffered from academic isolation as South Africa did during the years of the international academic boycott. But the existence of an intransparent government and political-bureaucratic machinery up to 1990 might have created a yearning to know and to understand their education system better.

In contrast to South Africa, Tanzania has long since passed through the post-independence educational and societal reconstruction of the 1960s – a project that bore limited success (cf. Wolhuter, 2004), and whatever educational reform is currently taking place, takes place within the prescribed fixed parameters of the World Bank Structural Adjustment Programme (which Tanzania had little option but to sign) and the neo-liberal global economic revolution. Tanzanian students therefore have a somewhat more detached (from everyday practice), purely intellectual expectation from Comparative Education courses.

Oman has recently commenced to develop a mass education system, therefore Omani students, as their South African and Greek counterparts are interested in the value of Comparative Education to illuminate and to guide domestic educational reform. A unique expectation which transpired among the responses of the Omani students, is that, in a country with one public university, and 5097 students studying abroad (total tertiary enrolment 68154) (UNESCO, 2008), Comparative Education will be seen a means to obtain knowledge of foreign education systems, which will facilitate students to proceed to further (post-graduate) studies abroad. Similarly, among the Thai post-graduate cohort, an interesting expectation was what would assist them in finding an appropriate research design for their theses.

Cuban students viewed Comparative Education as a way to gain a fuller understanding of various countries' societies and cultures. Cuban students' expectations could have been shaped by their country's history of using education to create a new society and culture since 1961 (cf. Arnove, 1982). They view Comparative Edu-

cation as revealing how their own as well as other societies and cultures were shaped by education, and how education contributes to the accomplishment of societal goals, such as societal justice.

These findings have implications for course curricula, for the conceptualization of the significance of Comparative Education, and for the Comparative Education research agenda. Surveying the outlines on the CIECAP (2008) website; and in Wolhuter et al. (Eds) (2009), it appears that Comparative Education course curricula are often at variance with the (legitimate) needs and expectations of students in which Comparative Education courses have the potential to provide.

Finally, the repetition of this survey amongst students in more countries and at other levels will be a valuable complement to the study. Every sample in this study yielded a particular and valuable perspective on Comparative Education. New samples will open new vistas for Comparative Education, thus contributing towards making it a even more fruitful field.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1. The pre-course questionnaire (the questionnaire used in the study)

#### Pre-questionnaire: open-ended questions

1. What do you know about the field of study "Comparative Education"?
2. Why study Comparative Education?
3. What do you think you will learn during the course?

#### Pre-questionnaire: closed questions

##### 1. Why study Comparative Education?

Rank in order of importance, 1 as the most important to 9 as the least important, plus any comments

Category	Rank	Comment
Exciting		
To help me to teach abroad		
Interesting		
Worthwhile		
To gain knowledge of other education systems		
Broaden mind		
Personal development		
To improve my teaching		
To compare own education system with others		
To compare various educational systems		

##### 2. What do you think you will learn during the course

Rank in order of importance, 1 as the most important to 9 as the least important, plus any comments

Category	Rank	Comment
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		

## Appendix 2. Students' Responses to the question "What do you know about the field of Comparative Education?"

Country	Student details	Findings on question	Interview comments
USA	Masters Program: International Training and Education.	Students show some understanding and interest in various educational factors, such as systems, outcomes, expectations, practice and culture.	"I know that it probably includes the study of education around the world and how different factors (poverty, location, culture) impact on education".
Ireland	Final3 year B.Ed. primary student teachers (3 <sup>rd</sup> year program)	89% knew Comparative Education was about studying other systems of education.	"this taught me about another system" "their different methods, styles and structures".
Bulgaria	Bachelor of Education students at two universities.	47% answered that it entails the study of the Bulgarian education system and its comparison with other education systems	
Greece	Student teachers at university	Undergraduate students (future teachers), University of Crete and University of Thrace (fourth year students)	Students indicated that they view the CE course as an exciting course and as an opportunity to improve and compare their education system with others; to gather useful educational knowledge and practices.
Cuba	Teacher trainees	Comparative Education entails the study of systems of education and allows comparison between systems, in order to know the role of the Cuban education system in the formation and development of the Cuban culture	
Tanzania	Undergraduate student teachers at a university	72% of the students viewed Comparative Education as a study of educational comparisons and differences in the different countries of the world.	
South Africa	A cohort of B. Ed. Honours students at one university.	33% wrote that it involves studying and/or using the best of systems, practices and policies in order to improve the South African education system	
Oman	Student teachers at university	Students identified Comparative Education as studying different education systems and comparing them.	- "the study of educational systems in different countries and compare them with the education system of one's own country. "