

## THE MEANING, POSSIBILITY, AND LIMITS OF THE COMPARISON IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the present study is to examine the meaning, possibility and limits of comparison in the philosophy of education. In order to achieve this purpose, the concept analysis method has been used. Accordingly, first comparative philosophy, then education, and, finally, philosophy of comparative education have become conceptualized. The study results show that comparative philosophy in terms of nature can be viewed as a method, view or both. Education naturally is also a double valued action. The philosophy of comparative education, as a combination of the two former terms, is a new field that recognizes each of the two fields of comparative philosophy and education with their own particular features and is based on the basic assumption that if two educational systems are compared (from a philosophical point of view), these features should be fully and precisely addressed in the comparison. In the comparison of West's educational philosophy with that of East, there are three options: in the first and second options, one of the two West or East education philosophies is negative and bad, and the other is seen as positive and good. In none of these two systems, comparison is possible. Therefore, there is a third option in which the West or East education philosophies both have positive and negative aspects, and none of them are absolutely good or bad. The claim of the present study is that the option is acceptable, and comparison in educational philosophies is meaningful and possible only within this limits.*

**Keywords:** Comparative philosophy, Education, Philosophy of comparative education, West's educational philosophy, East's educational philosophy.

### INTRODUCTION

The knowledge of philosophy and principles of comparative education is inadequate. As Cowen (2010:50) suggests, comparative education has a low level of theoretical principles. Literature and papers' review available in the books and journals of this field shows that the emphasis of comparative researchers is on conducting quantitative research and they have considered fundamental and philosophical studies less. For example, one of the most reliable sources available in the field "Quarterly of Comparative Education" is devoted to philosophical papers in comparative education (Vol.40, No.4, November 2004). Of course this is a good opportunity but insufficient. Given the above, it is necessary to conduct philosophical studies in the field of comparative education. Conducting such studies provides the ground for creating a new framework and searching for solutions for new problems or solutions to address these problems.

Accordingly, comparative education should be placed on the "constructivist" path and should avoid "simple descriptions", as well as should address "creative synthesis of ideas". In order to achieve this goal, the comparative education approach should be a complex mentality of a problem (Cowen, 2003 a: 300). The secret of this success is creating sympathy between studied ideas. It is also a necessary requirement for discussion among ideas. The possibility of mutual understanding between ideas and the proximity between them can only be achieved if discussions can be established on the basis of the principle of tolerance.

According to the above, the present paper has been conducted as a philosophical study aimed to help develop the principles of comparative education. For this study, three research questions have been formulated as follows: 1) What is the nature of comparative philosophy? 2) What is the nature of education? and 3) What is the nature of the philosophy of comparative education?

## METHODOLOGY

The method used in the present study is "Concept Analysis". The purpose of the method of concept analysis or philosophical analysis is to understand and improve the set of concepts or conceptual structures that accordingly we interpret experiences, express our goals, construct the problems, and conduct the research. Thus, in the present study, concept analysis, comparison possibility and limits in the philosophy of education has been addressed, the cases of use, and the broader conditions and aspects, and in terms of deeper meaning, have been analyzed conceptually. Concept analysis research method can be implemented in three main ways including: "construct the concept", "interpret the concept", and "assess the structure of the concept". In the interpretation of the concept, the goal of the researcher is to obtain a defensible objective interpretation of a term that the term also requires a credible understanding of the use or meaning in the ordinary language. In constructing the concept, new concepts are created, especially when existing concepts are ambiguous and require a new conceptualization. In evaluating the concept structure, in addition to understanding, the conceptual structure is the ground of a theory, model, argument, or research program. Determining the adequacy of a conceptual structure to be used in education research is also considered as a goal (Coombs and Daniels, 1991:27-41). In the present study with the aim to analyze the concept, possibility and limits of the comparison in the philosophy of education, among a variety of research methods related to concept analysis, the concept interpretation has been used.

## RESULTS

### *Answer to Research Question 1: What is the nature of comparative philosophy?*

"Comparative philosophy" is a product of modern era, and especially the twentieth century. Some also believe that comparative philosophy before the modern era from the beginning was a philosophy and common for the old philosophers as a philosophical way of evaluating philosophical ideas. Of course, we should say that though in the essence of philosophy, there is a judgment and comparison of ideas, it cannot be said that this is a comparative philosophy. At the beginning of this century, the requirements of "historicism," and "Western Orientalism" attracted some to the establishment of this field. For what is the nature of comparative philosophy? there are two or even three points of view: some considered it as a method, some considered it a view, and finally the third group considered it as a method and view:

A group that considers comparative philosophy as a whole method believes that comparative philosophy has been described in this way in terms of the adoption of a comparative method. Therefore, comparative philosophy is a way of comparing philosophical ideas. So a comparative idea in the scope of philosophy is a methodological one. This view is mainly posed by "positivists", especially "Mason-Oursel". Oursel is the initiator of the theory of comparative philosophy and the establishment of a comparative philosophy in a new sense. In "Comparative Philosophy", (Masson-Oursel, 1926) he focused on comparative philosophy, and sets out a specific method, structure, goal, and strategy for it, and proposes it as a philosophical system and a field in philosophical studies. Oursel praised Comte's positivist methodology and made it necessary for comparative philosophy. Accordingly, he considers the philosophy method both scientific and objective, and considers philosophical data historical naturally and, of course, dependent on its own (temporal and spatial) locus. In his view, philosophical studies are based on a kind of comparison of data in the context of history. Oursel considered the human history including three major European, Indian, and Chinese civilizations. He considered the Chinese civilization in the East temporally and spatially, the Indian civilization in the middle and the European civilization in the West as the three main centers of the human civilizations. He stated that we should consider the European civilization as the point of departure and build our own comparison with other civilizations on this basis. From the point of view of Oursel, the Indian civilization as a continuous tradition is after the Chinese and Greek civilizations to our time and has influenced various cultures from Iran to Japan, from Africa to the West. From the point of view of Oursel, a comparative method communicates between "facts," and essentially the truth is discovered in the same proportions and comparisons i.e. the truth is relative from his point of view. Given that comparison in philosophy for Oursel has positive, historical and, of course, relative characteristics, it is therefore possible for him to compare the ideas and philosophies only within their own time and atmosphere and otherwise no comparison can be made.

The theory and methodology of Oursel has been criticized by some scholars. Among these critics, we have "Corbin" great French orientalist. He believed that comparative philosophy cannot take into account a sacred aspect. The sacred aspect is seen in his ideas and works. Corbin has a unique method in studying the "History of Islamic-Iranian philosophy" (1981), and especially the tradition of Iranian philosophy. In his opinion, comparative philosophy deals with intuitive perception of nature. Corbin rejected the method of the ancients in comparative philosophy, including the positivist method of Oursel, and replaced it by its own method of phenomenology. His method is far from the history; and of course, he considered history in comparative studies. Contrary to the positivist view that considers the human as a creature in history he considered history in the human. This view of history makes it possible for the incidence of the heavenly aspects of the events of this world and the earthly realm. This history is not an empirical one, but holy and belongs to the world of examples. In his view, comparative philosophy is an effort for meta-history intrinsic understanding, appearing in the form of phenomena, and every genuine philosophy benefits it according to its own capacity. Corbin believed in wisdom and the transcendental and meta-history truth. Accordingly, in his view, the truth has not fully emerged and is always manifested. Corbin considered the Iranian philosophies, including the philosophy of Sheikh-E- Ishraq and Mulla-E- Sadra, as perfect examples of this kind of idea.

Different from the above view, a group from the late 20th century criticized methodological views and considered the comparison not a method but a view and position. The basis of the



discussion of comparative philosophy as a view, first, has been the historical self-awareness of the West in modern times. This self-awareness is orientalism. This means that the West interprets the East in its comparative philosophy based on its culture. Basically, one of the grounds of the formation and development of comparative philosophy has been the "culture". From the very beginning of the emergence of culture as a product of modern rationalism, the West and the East comparison has been questioned by the West, and they have always considered the culture of the West as superior and reference to the culture of the East. In fact, the West, with orientalism seeks to undermine the culture of Asia and the East. This view also dominated the comparative philosophy. Even European Oriental studies were conducted for the colonization and exploitation of the East. Gradually and with the development of education and the growth of awareness in the Eastern nations, their scholars criticized and challenged this situation, and discussions such as "post-colonialism" and "anti- orientalism" were also formed by Eastern scholars and even some Western thinkers. For example, "Said" criticized the West Europe-centric view in his book "orientalism"(1978), saying that the West has adapted and interpreted the East according to its conditions. In his opinion, comparative philosophy is based on the same premises and political intentions and cognition.

Nasr also followed this tradition as one of the traditional thinkers. He who advocates perennial wisdom or "sacred science" considers comparative philosophy possible and meaningful only in the case of accepting the perennialwisdom. In his view, one of the main requirements for having a comparative philosophy is to serve perennialwisdom (1973). According to Nasr, modern philosophy lacks the ability to understand the spiritual aspects of the Eastern wisdom, which all have a religious and intuitive basis. Therefore, it is impossible to establish a relationship between Eastern and Western philosophies. The comparative philosophy cannot include perennialwisdom: perennialwisdom is based on the fact that the truth is one and every philosophical, mystical, and religious system in all cultures and times all see that single truth, and discover and express one of its aspects according to their share. The perennialwisdom is a divine idea. The prerequisite for the perennialwisdom is to confess the divine truth. This fact is not inherently temporal and, of course, its appearance is gradual. This wisdom was the first doctrine of the divine truth among human beings which has been mentioned in the scriptures and the teachings of the Prophets, goods, philosophers, and scholars.

It seems that this opposite view is not correct and has its own special critics. For example, Bagheri Noaparast (2015), while considering orientalism and anti-orientalism as wrong, believed that Saeid has drawn a line between the West and the East. He also criticized Nasr's view that his view of sacred science has the following drawbacks: a) believes that the East is confronted with the West; b) considers Western science as wrong , and that Eastern science as right, and c) ignores the degree of science and sees the science as sacred. Bagheri believed that both "generality" and "locality" should be considered, and instead of drawing a line between the West and the East, one should consider arelationship between them.

There is also a group of those who believe that comparative philosophy cannot be considered as a view, as it cannot be completely clear. But a third point should be considered that combines the benefits of both (the method and view). This position is based on the assumption that there is an inherent dependency between the view and method.

***Answer to Research Question 2: What is the nature of education?***



Various perspectives can be considered and used to discuss the education. In accordance with the context of the comparative debate, education here has been seen from the perspective of "double valued action". These three words need to be explained and analyzed: "action" in the phrase "double valued action" means that activities carried out in educational settings, all actions that are performed according to imagination, tendencies, and intentions. For example, in Islamic anthropology, the action has a certain definition, principles, and effect: In Quran, the human action is a solution to the internal struggles of the various forces of the human being. Accordingly, in Islam, "the human is known as an Actor". The given action in Quran is different from the "act" and "behavior" and refers to those acts that originate from certain principles including knowledge, desire, will, plan, and determination. Accordingly, in order to be able to attribute an action to the human, it is necessary to find an image and cognitive image of it, tendency and desire for it, and willingness and will to realize it. When an action raised with these principles, he will be responsible for it. The human action in Quran will affect the "Action Principles" as well as the "Position of the Actor" and this effect is to strengthen its principles and position (BagheriNoaparast, 2003:260-283).

Of course, Islam's emphasis on the human does not mean that in explaining social affairs individuals should be considered as beings with absolute science and power in such a way that they can always understand the results of their actions and they are always able to achieve their goals, despite various conditions, but Islamic anthropology requires that human beings be considered responsible at all stages of social development, and that social transformations, including those responsible for their actions, should be explained.

"Double valued" in the phrase "double valued action" means that educational phenomena are more valuable than other phenomena in other human sciences. Of course, a "valued action" is a common point of the human sciences. Each distinct human science will study this valued action from a particular point of view. In education, this valued action becomes doubled. Because like other human actions, it is an action (not behavior), and this is a value. But the doubled aspect is because in the education we have positive and desired aims and goals, and efforts are made to realize them. Education with this distinctive feature has its own methodology and it is "philosophical research method" (not scientific in the sense of positivism). In other words, a philosophical study of values that are considered as educational goals and aims will form part of educational research. Of course, scientific research method also has its own position in education. But the given scientific method in it does not have a positivist concept that is based on the causal mechanisms. Therefore, empirical knowledge of the "actions" of men for their relationship with goals is considered.

### ***Answer to Question 3: What is the nature of the philosophy of comparative education?***

After presenting the terms "comparative philosophy" and "education," we try to conceptualize the term "philosophy of comparative education". Like comparative philosophy, "comparative education" is also a common term and has been established in the 20th century as a university field of study. But the philosophy of comparative education has not yet reached its position as a field of study, nor even as a study area in the West and the East. "Although philosophy has a lot of implicit implications in the work of comparative education, as well as comparative education specialists do not disregard philosophical studies, the role of philosophy in comparative education has not been clearly highlighted. One of the aspects of lack of clarity is no development of the relationship between the "philosophy of education" and "comparative education."





However, regardless of the above, philosophical and comparative approaches to education studies should have formed, sensitive and critical discussion with each other. The study of the relationship between comparative education and the philosophy of education at least has the advantage that the experts of both fields provide a new insight into the basics of using the two fields of study in one another studies, this provides the opportunity for inter-disciplinary collaboration for experts and a constructive discussion among them" (McLaughlin,2004).

Of course, the "philosophy of education", as one of the additional philosophies of the twentieth century, has been formally established as an academic field of study. But the philosophy of comparative education seems to be a new ground. "The philosophy of comparative education" is a combination of the two terms "comparative philosophy" and "education". Other terms such as "comparative philosophy of education", "comparative studies in the philosophy of education" can also be found in this regard. But the philosophy of comparative education seems to be more precise. In order to process the concept of the philosophy of comparative education, as one of the branches of comparative philosophy, we should first return to some of the key features of the two constructive concepts of the term, i.e. comparative philosophy and education:

As mentioned earlier, the comparative philosophy is the modern era phenomenon, which focuses on the positivist and orientalism approach to culture. This phenomenon cannot accept events such as perennial wisdom and sacred aspect in its own atmosphere. On the other hand, education is a double valued action. With describing these three words, it is clear that these three characteristics of education are inconsistent with the characteristics of the comparative philosophy that are mentioned above, so that the true education cannot be interpreted and analyzed in a positivist atmosphere. Given this, can the philosophy of comparative education be essentially discussed? In other words, can two positive and post-positive atmospheres be combined? If this is possible, how? The answer is yes. We can talk about the philosophy of comparative education. Of course, there should be considerations in this regard. As in comparative philosophy, also when the concepts of perennial wisdom and sacred aspect are added, a new atmosphere emerges, that is, a new comparative philosophy is formed. It should now be seen that how the philosophy of comparative education will be with double valued action.

The philosophy of comparative education also has the same atmosphere. This means that several methods and perspectives can be imagined for it. Since in the method and view, education was first formed in the positivist atmosphere, this atmosphere also dominated the comparative education and, consequently, the philosophy of comparative education. The comparative education as a field of study was formed in two "institutional" and "intellectual" forms, and "social" and "epistemological" forms (including the views of positivism, relativism, and historical functionalism) of power formed its lines in a dialectical interaction. Therefore, the establishment of the study field of comparative education is not only based on the "cognitive criteria" (scientific and professional necessities), but also is the result of the practical and political pressures of a contradictory set of power forces (Manzon, 2018:2). Gradually education released from the burden of positivism and was presented as a double valued action. According the above, the philosophy of comparative education that presents each of the two fields of comparative philosophy and education with their certain characteristics is based on the basic presumption that if two educational systems (philosophically) compare the ideas of two educational philosophers, or two educational concepts (philosophically), these characteristics should be



considered in the comparison completely and precisely. Also the theories of comparative education that have been formed in recent years have coordinated themselves with this atmosphere. In these theories, problems such as the creation of colonial and colonized, central and peripheral dipoles, and the top-down view of the educational systems of the colonized countries, the reproduction view to the educational system, education capitalism, the emphasis on positive education, and globalization of education have been severely criticized.

An example of the East-West contrast has been criticized by BagheriNoaparast (2017) in critique of Shariati's educational perspective. In BagheriNoaparast's view, in the "philosophy of education" (1979) believed that there is a sharp contrast between Islamic education and Western education. Shariati has compared the education philosophy of Islam and Iran in its traditional view with Western philosophy of education with a modern view. In his view, the West is in contradiction with the educational philosophy of Islam in terms of ontology, epistemology, anthropology, ethics, and values. Bagheri, while criticizing Shariati's viewpoint in this regard, believed that the West is not a united entity, and on this basis there is no unity that can be considered as a confrontation with Islam. Finally, BagheriNoaparast believed in the interaction between the two rather than the contradiction between the West's educational philosophy and the educational philosophy of Islam. He stated that the interaction is the necessity of life, and since it is the subject is the human education, and its nature is everywhere and always the same, therefore, in addition to paying attention to the principle of "originality" in the context of difference, it is necessary to address the interaction between the two educational systems.

## DISCUSSION

Conducting a comparative study of the philosophy of education is always complex and sensitive and some problems threaten this action. One of the most important of these problems (and perhaps the most important problem) is the "totalitarianism" error. A comparative researcher intentionally or unintentionally encounters this error, one of the parties would consider the comparison as general, absolute, and good, and another would consider it as partial, incomplete, and bad (Mirzamohammadi, 2014:21). Given this, the comparison of the West's education system with that of the East may show this problem in one of two of the following ways:

A) Another education system (West) is a negative and bad one, and our education system (East, Iran) is a good and positive one: if a comparative scholar enters the comparison process with this presumption, he cannot achieve a fair outcome. And so his study cannot be documented. The large part of the acclaimed scientific achievements that today solved many human problems and brought welfare and development for him is the result of West education system, and this is a fact that cannot be overlooked. For example, almost all content and methods in the field of education sciences are the result of studies by Western scholars that we use as the importer. Given these few short sentences, it can be concluded that, with this presupposition, there is no possibility of interacting and discussing two educational systems and, of course, their comparison, the same presupposition believed by Saeid, Nasr, and Shariati.

B) The other education system (West) is a good and positive one, and our education system (East, Iran) is a negative and bad one: the other side is the problem of totalitarianism that can even be more dangerous than the previous one. The study of the history of education in Iran in the contemporary era shows that the architecture of our country's education system, whether at the level of general, or higher, and even adult education, is based on this presumption and in fact is



an inappropriate imitation of West education system. The policymakers and decision makers of the country's education system, who came to the West with the achievements of the education system of the country, returned to the country with the achievements with no changes to execute without criticism and assessment in the country that had no result. This process has begun since the establishment of the Dar-E-Al-Fonon"school of technology" (a symbol of the modernization of education in contemporary Iran) and is still ongoing.

Given the above, it can be concluded that with this presupposition also there will be no possibility of interacting and discussing two educational systems and, of course, their comparison. Accordingly, in none of the above two systems, the comparison is not realistic, and the third option should be followed; the option is as follows:

The other educational system (West) and our educational system (East, Iran) each have positive and negative aspects: with this presupposition, the possibility of comparison is provided, and it is possible to talk about the interaction between West and East philosophy of education. Accordingly, the philosophy of education in these two systems, each of which has originality according to the context of its formation, and is different from any other system. But they have a common border, which is the "human being" that is the subject of education, which links the two systems and allows for constructive discussion between them. If the goal of education is to bring man to perfection, each of the education philosophies of the West and the East can contribute to this goal and help each other. By giving a common language, discussion is possible between education philosophies, and the common language is the truth of human being. According to this common language, comparison is possible. The comparison of the proximity factor will be the establishment of understanding and peace among the educational systems of the world (Ardizzone, 2002). In response to these concerns and development of education documents in the Iran it has been attempted to pay attention to the correct comparison, for example, in the indicator 6 in the methodology of theoretical studies "The Document of Philosophy of Education" we have: "benefit from the success of other education systems in the world by avoiding imitation or inappropriate combination" (Sadeghzade et al, 2013:10).

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