

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PEDAGOGY OF LEARNER-CENTRED
EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH AND INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
CULTURAL DIMENSIONS**

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ABSTRACT: *This paper has addressed an important policy issue of two countries – Bangladesh and India, with regard to educational reform since both the countries consider Learner-centred Education central to long-term educational change. The comparative study is based upon Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions framework. The analysis shows some similarities along with some dissimilarities in matter of pedagogical implications of Learner-centred Education in these countries. The study gives the guideline to the researchers and policy makers.*

KEYWORDS: Learner-centred Education, Bangladesh, India, Cultural Dimensions

INTRODUCTION

Although the learning process is a matter of 'cognitive physiology' (Schweisfurth, 2013: 1), which is very complex in its general manifestations to the laypersons, its overriding influential pervasiveness has been a recurrent theme for the international and comparative education researchers for the last few decades. Academicians belonging to the paradigm of international and comparative education or related ones throughout the world are now considering the issue of learning process not only in the short and limited context of classroom or institution but also in a fairly larger or broader landscape of culture and policy making. In this short essay, I would try to compare and evaluate the learning process of the learners in Bangladesh and India in the light of Learner-centred Education. I will exploit Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework for this comparison. I will emphasis particularly on Power Distance, Individualism and Collectivism, Masculinity and Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Indulgence and Restraint as my comparison criteria.

Rationale for Comparison

In my essay I would investigate the pedagogy of Learner-centred Education, its relevant theoretical underpinnings, complexities and possibilities in the educational arena of Bangladesh and India. It is a 'sound and viable choice for policy and practice in the developing world' (Schweisfurth, 2013: 61). Since the importance of literacy and numeracy as the component of human capital is immense, research evidence shows that Learner-centred classroom yields far more highly than the teacher-centred or rote learning-based classroom (Ibid: 62). Besides, research evidence from practical realities also shows that Learner-centred Education is really worthy of investigation from its assumed remedial roles to fight 'dropouts and school refusal' (Ibid: 1)

I choose Bangladesh and India because both the countries have some commonalities in their geo-political or socio-cultural and economic aspects. According to World Economic League table 2015, India is the largest economy among the Commonwealth countries. But if we consider Real GDP Growth rate, India (7.3) is not very far ahead of Bangladesh (6.5). Moreover, According to World Economic Forum Human Capital Report 2015, Bangladesh and India have been indexed at the same level with equal score of 57.62 out of the total score 100. Both these Asian countries with huge population bear British colonial hangovers and similar kind of beliefs and attitudes. Both owe to British education system and bureaucracy as well (Siddiqui, 1996). So this sort of comparative evaluation might help the policy makers to formulate effective policies for the development of pedagogy in particular and human capital in general.

I want to follow Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory to carry out my comparative evaluation. The Bray and Thomas framework can be taken into account only for identifying three different aspects of comparison variables such as 'Countries', 'Teaching methods' and 'Entire population' (Phillips and Schweisfurth, 2014: 21). Although there are some criticisms against Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory such as methodological oversimplification, cultural and personal differences within countries, overlapping quality of the aspects, time relevance and cultural determinism, still it has a very significant role in exploring educational differences and similarities. I think applying this theory will help us in exploring cultural issues germane to education system and understanding the conceptual framework of comparative and international education itself.

Use of principles of comparison

Out of six cultural dimensions of Hofstede, I have chosen five dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism vs Collectivism, Masculinity vs Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance and Indulgence.

Power Distance

Both Bangladesh (80) and India (77) scores high in this dimension which means people accept a hierarchical order and accept that power is distributed unequally. The pedagogical implication is that teacher is the controller or manipulator of the learning process in classroom and school situation. Teacher-centred education is in practice and learner autonomy is neglected in these countries.

Individualism vs Collectivism

Although it is erroneous to be too sweeping in offering cultural generalisations (Elliot and Tudge, 2007: cited in Nguyen et al, 2009), it can rationally be assumed that most western cultures are associated with Individualism whereas most Asian cultures are identified with Collectivism. Bangladesh with a low score of 20 is considered a collectivist society. This is manifest in a close long term commitment to the member group. In the learning process it is manifest in overlooking the individual learner difference in a classroom situation. This indifference might cause dropout or school leaving in some cases. This Collectivist aspect of Bangladesh might be attributed to its dominant religion Islam or Muslim philosophy. The Muslims believe in Collective life style, 'Jamaah' based (congregational) life grouped under a leader. Here, the aspect of power distance is also prevalent simultaneously in this case of leader-member relationship.

On the other hand, India with an intermediate score of 48 is a society with both Collectivistic and Individualistic traits. This individualistic aspect might be due to her principal religion Hinduism. The Hindus believe in a cycle of death and rebirth, with the manner of each rebirth being dependent on how the individual lived in preceding life. So, they are individually responsible.

Masculinity vs Femininity

In Masculinity Bangladesh (score 55) and India (score 56) are almost in the same position and are considered a Masculine society. But in reality, if we link it to gender sensitivity and women enrolment in schools, India is considerably ahead of Bangladesh because of the nature of religious practice. The Hindus in India are not responsible for religious ritualistic performance in their everyday life. But the Muslims of Bangladesh are generally very practising persons. They try to follow religious codes in most steps of life, although not amounting to fundamentalism or religious fanaticism. The spread of ‘Madrasa’(religious education centre) education is a strong evidence of this fact. In 2005, approximately, 31.3% of total graduating students graduate from madrasas in Bangladesh (Source: Ministry of Education, Bangladesh Govt.). Another aspect of masculinity is revealed when we see low enrolment rate, low response in classroom and high dropout rate among Bangladeshi female students. And this is also due to parent’s narrow religious outlook that shapes the decision of keeping their girls away from ‘so-called materialistic’ (Siddiqui,1996: 103) education.

Uncertainty Avoidance

In Bangladesh with a high score of Uncertainty Avoidance (60) it means people maintain rigid codes of life and are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas. The pedagogical implication of this is that education policy and curriculum, teaching and learning style all are almost ‘fixed in nature’ (Siddiqui,1996: 57) and it reflects in unwillingness to bring fundamental change, maybe through policy borrowing, whether good or bad.

Indulgence

Both countries scoring low (Bangladesh -20, India-26) in Indulgence means that they both belong to culture of restraint and have a tendency to cynicism and pessimism. The pedagogical implication of this culture is that students do not generally feel free in their interactions with teachers which means that LCE is not in vogue here. The underlying reason of this cultural restraint might have a link to the religious values of the people of this region.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although culture is not the ‘only determinant of teaching and learning’ (Gu and Schweisfurth, 2006: 75) process, its significance can never be underestimated. Sternberg (2007 cited in Schweisfurth, 2013) uses the theory of ‘successful intelligence’ in arguing for a better understanding of learning in a different cultural contexts and shows that individuals in different cultures may think about concepts and problems in different ways. Drawing on the above discussion, the importance of deeper understanding of various cultural facets in relation to pedagogy is of paramount importance in the domain of International and Comparative Education. I think, it is rational enough to initiate comparison between two settings, as we have taken Bangladesh and India, which are a bit homogeneous in some aspects.

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