

Dr. Dusan M. Savicevic
Faculty of Philosophy
Belgrade, Yugoslavia

Structures, Patterns, Methods: What ist „The Standards“?

A. Basic Features of Research

1. The first question which we need to ask is what is the territory of comparative andragogy, because comparative andragogy is subdiscipline of andragogy.
2. We need to discuss more about methodology of comparative research in the field of adult education than about methods. In an earlier phase of development, methodology was equated with the notion of methods of research. Such an understanding does not have an important scientific basis. Methodology is an constitutive part of every science.
3. The general approach of science determines the broad characteristics of methodology. What is the relationship between various scientific methods and specific scientific disciplines? Among such relationships is the dialectic relationship. They are very closely connected. The methods that are chacteristic of each discipline are very closely connected with its theoretical understandings. The subject of methodology is not only the study of methods, techniques and procedures. Methodology of a study includes both logical and epistemological dimensions of a particular discipline. Methodology is never restricted to the techniques of research. It has its basis in philosophical disciplines: axiology and epistemology. Methodology helps to make concrete the epistemological assumptions of a specific discipline.
4. Methodology comprises two main aspects of study: philosophy of science, logical analysis, and sythesis. Methodology comprises a general orientation toward a science.

5. Emphasizing methodology is important for a discipline which has not developed its theoretical system and concepts. The relationship between methods and procedures and techniques are not always clear. Methodology includes generalization of techniques and concretization of philosophy in relation to some problems of research. The methodological literature should help a researcher to select approach, to enable the researcher to chose the approach which fits the research question.

6. We need to consider relations between methodology, logic, and scientific theory. Methodology is broader than the logic of the research framework. The methodology besides contributing to a logical framework has a heuristic function. It should guide the directions and strategy of the research.

7. Then we need to consider relations between theory and methodology. The relationship in the literature is not always clear. We cannot equate scientific theory and methodology. The researcher considers a broader scientific framework in order to successfully specify the research question.

8. The methodology of a discipline cannot depend on one theory, because theory is very easily transcended, redefined or rejected. The task of methodology is to criticise theory and all theoretical conditions. Methodology, in respect to theory, has interpretative functions.

B. Comparative Research

1. Comparative education research is based on a specific methodology and philosophy of education. Comparative research in andragogy has a broader philosophical-cognitive framework. In comparative research, we are starting from aims, but our aims depend of the prevailing philosophy of our own society and the view of the world which the researcher has.

2. Why do we compare? Because we are living in an interdependent world. Comparison is one of the aspects of human thinking. It is the framework for much research.

3. There are different approaches to comparative adult education research. The methodological approaches to comparative research are changing: from description of educational systems, based on conceptions borrowed from foreign experience, toward increase theoretical grounding of comparative research in adult education. The function of comparison has been changing: from comparisons of similarities and differences in the system of adult education toward testing theory and hypotheses based on data.

4. In comparative research we have a methodological pluralism. As I emphasized early, the methodology in comparative research cannot only be considered from the standpoint of method. In comparative adult education research we can use almost every method applicable in the social sciences. The specificity of using these methods is the subject of research. It is wiser to speak about comparative framework of research in education and learning of adults, than about comparative method.

5. What can we study on a comparative basis in the field of education of adults? Almost every phenomena: educational systems for adults, educational structures, plans and programs, teaching and learning methods, theory of education, etc. We can also study comparisons between institutions, towns, regions, nations, and regional groups of countries, as they pertain to adult education.

C. Epistemology (Ways of Knowing)

We need to consider the role of epistemology in comparative research in the field of adult education. As we know there are different epistemological approaches in adult education research. Is it possible to compare these different research traditions? Is it possible to speak about epistemological unity in comparative research? All these questions deserve to be discussed when we speak about methods in comparative andragogy. Let me mention some of these approaches:

1. Positivism and its Limitations in Comparative Study of Adult Education

a) Positivism is a philosophical school of thought. We know that positivism was applied in history of social science. We also know that there is more than one variant of positivism: neopositivism, logical positivism, scientism.

b) Positivism seeks to discover laws in the field of education. The researcher is at a distance. He is trained to have „objectivity“. For him, knowledge is neutral, impartial, and ahistorical. This epistemological orientation is based on analysis and differences. In the basis of that approach we can find elements of Taylorism which is characteristic for working process in industry. This way of thinking lacks synthesis.

c) In the field of education there are strong critiques of the positivistic orientation. There is a tendency to emphasize the social context in comparative research. Critiques are also directed toward neutrality and a values orientation. We need to pay attention to ethical questions of comparative research in the field of adult education.

2. Hermeneutics and its Role in Comparative Research of Adult Education

a) Why has hermeneutics not played a major role in comparative research of adult education? We know that hermeneutics developed in German cultural and intellectual surroundings. It has its roots in German philosophy from the XIX century, from W. Dilthey time.

b) The essence of hermeneutics is understanding the importance of life experience and the life situation. The life situation is a main category in andragogy. Hermeneutics can help us better understand the culture of others. Hermeneutics uses qualitative analysis.

3. Critical Theory and its Role in Comparative Research of Adult Education

a) As we know, critical theory comes from philosophy and sociology and is connected to the Frankfurt school of thought and especially with the work of J. Habermas. This school of thought has influenced andragogical thinking and research. J. Mezirow, P. Freire and the followers of participatory research in adult education.

b) The concept of interest is a cornerstone of critical theory. From the view of critical theory, science and research are not neutral. Critical theory is directed toward critique of ideology.

4. The Role of Phenomenology in Comparative Research of Adult Education

The phenomenological approach to research is rather neglected in the field of adult education. This approach can be very helpful in comparative research, too. It offers explanations what we experience: space, time, relationship between people etc. Phenomenology includes: thinking, believing, understanding, and other things which are connected.

5. The meaning of Paradigms in Comparative Adult Education

a) In the literature of education as a whole and especially in adult education there are various contributions concerning the role of paradigm in research. There are different meanings of paradigm from the time when Kuhn analyzed paradigm shifts.

b) Sometimes a paradigm is understood as a model. In comparative adult education research we have had cases when authors tried to build models. Remember how Liveright (1966) tried to build models of the system of education of adults.

c) A paradigm is an idealized type of model. A paradigm compares to explain. It intends a kind of juxtaposition.

d) In scientific research there are descriptive models. We can design descriptive models of „ideal man“ as we imagine how people should function in future. It can create a „negative model“ of people we hope will not appear in the future. The models are created on the basis of philosophical thinking.

e) Models are very general. That emphasizes symbols and can lead to simplification.

6. The Dialectical Approach in Comparative Adult Education

a) A dialectical approach considers that empirical facts need to be analyzed only in light of a certain theory. It intends to bring about goals based on a partial and incomplete earlier approach.

b) A dialectic approach considers education of adults as a dialectic phenomena to change contemporary conditions in close relationship with the social, historical and economic context.

c) The dialectic approach included the philosophical dimension of adult education.

7. Epistemological Holism in Comparative Study of Adult Education

a) It is desirable that different approaches be connected with each other. It is possible to consider them together. We should not overlook differences among them.

b) These different epistemological approaches can be in harmony, without dichotomy.

c) For rational integration of different approaches it is necessary to have fundamental methodological training of researchers in undergraduate and postgraduate studies. The researchers cannot orient themselves toward conceptions they do not know about.