Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
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SUPRANATIONAL EDUCATION: A NEW FIELD OF KNOWLEDGE TO ADDRESS EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN A GLOBAL WORLD[1]

Javier M. Valle López

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to illustrate the emergence of *Supranational Policy of Education* (from a more holistic perspective, it may also be referred to as *Supranational Education*) as an area of the pedagogical sciences, which is closely connected with *Educational Policy*, *Comparative Education* and *International Education*. The article also aims to define the field of study and the areas of interest for this subject. Moreover, it explores the phenomena that contributed to its appearance and points out some of the most important educational policies generated by international organizations. The focus is placed on the nature of these policies as units of comparison.

Key words: *Supranational Policy of Education*; *Supranational Education*; *Comparative Education*; *International Education*; *Educational Policy*; *Epistemology*; *Globalization*.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo trata de abordar la *Política Educativa Supranacional* (a la que, desde una perspectiva más holística, podríamos referirnos sencillamente como *Educación Supranacional*) como un área emergente del saber pedagógico, en íntima conexión con la *Política Educativa*, la *Educación Comparada* y la *Educación Internacional*, tratando de acotar su objeto de estudio y apuntar sus áreas de interés propio. Se estudian también los fenómenos que han propiciado su aparición y se destacan algunas de las políticas más significativas que desde los diferentes organismos internacionales se han generado, atendiendo a la naturaleza de las mismas como posibles unidades de comparación.

Palabras clave: *Política Educativa Supranacional*; *Educación Supranacional*; *Educación Comparada*; *Educación Internacional*; *Política de la Educación*; *Epistemología*; *Globalización*.

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JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

INTRODUCTION

Comparative Education has undergone an interesting evolution in recent decades, both in its methods as well as in its ever-widening object of study. The changes are neither accidental nor due to chance. Rather, they address the progressive complexity of society and education. From a classic perspective, *Comparative Education* mainly consisted of studies that were *descriptive* (i.e., what happens) and *static* (i.e., at a particular point in time) on *national systems* (units of comparison that corresponded to national entities recognized as such by international laws) of *formal education* (a school system)[2]. However, the field nowadays covers a great deal more (see Table 1). *Comparative Education* cannot be understood with an interpretation of what is being described (i.e., why it happens) based on cultural factors, economics, demographics, etc. In other words, it has moved away from merely *descriptive* studies and on to *interpretative* ones[3]. Nor can *Comparative Education* be understood at present without appealing to historical analyses (dynamic studies) to show how what we find nowadays is the consequence of a long road of reforms that must be understood. Furthermore, it no longer refers exclusively to studies on a national level but rather the units of comparison have shifted both centrifugally and centripetally: the scope has widened beyond national borders and it now takes on international units (such as "OECD countries", "EU countries", "Mercosur countries" etc.); focus has also shifted to within the nation (intranational) to, for example, make comparisons among federated states of the same federal republic or among different linguistic regions in one country. And lastly, *Comparative Education* includes not only the formal domains of school education but it is also connected with analyzing non-formal policies, such as teaching adults to read, education for international development, plans for academic literacy, etc.

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2 An evolution of the discipline, expressed in brilliantly didactic terms, may be found in the classic manual by José Luis García Garrido entitled *Fundamentos de Educación Comparada* (GARCÍA GARRIDO, 1991, chapter I, pp. 25-84).
3 Agustín Velloso writes (although in an article only in reference to the Spanish comparativists of the early 20th century) about "two approaches to foreign education: description as opposed to explanation" (VELLOSO, 1989: 146-155).

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

Table 1: Criteria of analysis to examine the evolution of *Comparative Education*

CRITERIA OF EVOLUTION	COMPARATIVE EDUCATION			
	"CLASSICAL" APPROACH		"POSTMODERN" APPROACH	
FORM	What happens?	Descriptive studies	Interpretative studies	Why it happens (search for explanatory factors)
TIME	At a particular point in time	Static studies	Dynamic studies	At different times from an evolutionary perspective
SCOPE	In different countries	Exclusively national unit of comparison	The unit of comparison may be *Inter-National National Intra-National*	In different regions of the planet, in different countries or within one country
OBJECT	In formal education (schools)	Observation of educational systems	Observation of different educational realities	Inside and outside the classroom (Formal and non-formal education)

Source: original material.

This article asserts that *Comparative Education* is undergoing a new evolutionary challenge in today's post-modern society. This is due to the emergence of international organizations that stem from the tragedy of the World War II, and to the spread of globalization around the planet in the late 20th century.

Indeed, the appearance of international organizations and their growing involvement in actions of an educational nature are triggering a subtle but perceptible harmonization in how we understand the big questions that affect educational policies. In addition, the reality of a "global village" with information and communications technologies becoming tremendously sophisticated and widespread, is leading to unprecedented exchanges of knowledge and degrees of mobility among students and teachers. This causes a transfer of ideas and pedagogical practices that permeate every country and are gradually leading to large-scale schools of thought in education which are spreading more and more quickly.

As a result, new series of research and reflexive studies are becoming consolidated as a domain of knowledge in its own right: *Supranational Policy of Education* or, simply, *Supranational Education* if we understood it from a holistic perspective.

This article attempts to explain the appearance of that *Supranational Policy of Education* (or *Supranational Education*) as an area of pedagogic knowledge closely linked to *Educational Policy*, *Comparative Education* and *International Education*. It also aims to mark out its object of study and list its areas of interest.

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

1. PLACING *SUPRANATIONAL EDUCATION* IN CONTEXT (I): *EDUCATIONAL POLICY, COMPARATIVE EDUCATION* AND *INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION*

Supranational Policy of Education (or *Supranational Education* as we prefer to call it) is situated in permeable relation among *Educational Policy, Comparative Education* and *International Education.*

In addition to its scientific method for acquiring knowledge, what characterizes a scientific and academic discipline is the delimitation of an object of study (i.e., a field of reality from which to generate knowledge). Figure 1 shows a synthesis of the fundamental questions taken on by the three disciplines that we consider to have given rise to the *Supranational Policy of Education.*

Figure 1: Placing *Supranational Education* from objects of study of *Educational Policy, Comparative Education,* and *International Education*
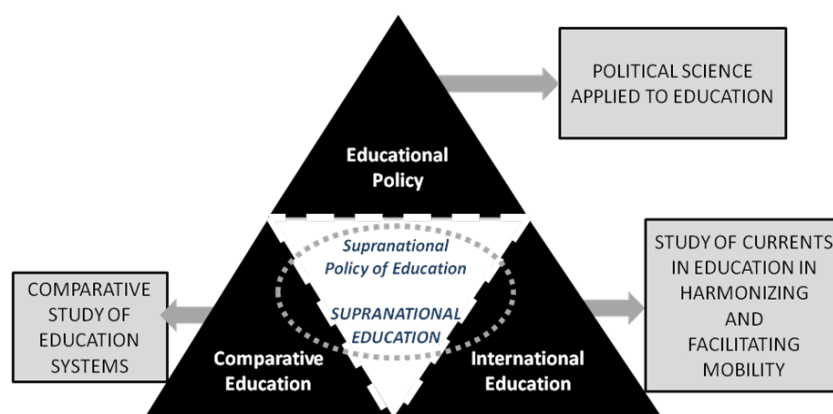
Source: original material.

Therefore, this first section will briefly address these three disciplines and their mutual relationships.

Expressed in simple terms, the *Educational Policy* (we could also say *Policy of Education*) may be considered to be the most general discipline of the three, and aims to study education from a political science basis in its normative dimension (*policy*) as well as in the mesh of its underlying dynamics (*politics*) (Aron, 1968: 26; de Puelles, 2008: 35). The purpose is to understand the political reality of a nation in terms of education. However, this "political reality" must be taken in a broad sense. Like Miller (1989: 518), we believe the "policy" (including both *policy* and *politics*) is "a process in which a group of people, whose opinions and interests are in principal divergent, make collective decisions that, as a rule of thumb, are considered compulsory for the group and are carried out in mutual agreement."

Thus, for "policy" to exist, there must be a negotiation that leads to collectively adopting decisions which are considered legitimate by the group in question and become, in this way, a set of actions that must be carried out. These actions are geared to pursuing specific aims considered to be beneficial according to the values system upheld by the group which they deem to be only attainable by means of these collectively agreed actions.

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
Journal of supranational policies of education, nº1, pp. 7-30

This way of understanding the concept of policy fits in perfectly well with what goes on in international organizations at present, since they are made up of a group of people with political responsibilities on behalf of states which use their institutions to negotiate actions guided by a set of objectives that reflect their values.

Closely connected with *Educational Policy*, *Comparative Education* intends to study different educational systems (normally using national units of comparison from an inter-national perspective) and contrast them to reveal their overlapping (similarities), their divergences (their own differentiating features) and their trends (emerging currents in education spreading across several countries). Its goal is to seek out ways for improvement in different national educational systems, ways that arise from the ideas contributed by experiences in other countries.

However, within the framework of current internationalization, international organizations are becoming prevalent in more and more countries, are institutionally more complex, and involve more significant policies that address more fields of social reality. As a consequence of this, it forces educational studies to include a supranational consideration. It calls for opening up a field from *Comparative Education*. This would now be verging on the domain of *International Education*. Tiana clearly pointed out:

"The study of contemporary education systems today requires taking on an international perspective, thereby broadening the field of view. National borders turn out to be insufficient for explaining what education systems truly are, their goals and their evolution. In other words, the study of international education constitutes an indispensable component in the training of specialists in education" (Tiana, 2009: 10).

This *International Education* is more specialized in the study (which can also be compared) of mobility and harmonization of both educational structures and curricula in different educational systems (also from an inter-national perspective). The intended purpose is focused more on practice, fostering such mobility and harmonization.

The lines between *International Education* and *Educational Policy* are still blurry and even more with *Comparative Education*. An example of the difficulties it has in gaining its epistemological independence is that some recently founded journals include *international* as an adjective but associate it directly with *Comparative Education*. An example of this is *Research in Comparative and International and Comparative Education*[4]. By contrast, the *Journal of Studies in International Education* has been around for several years; its field of interest is specifically *International Education*[5], which, as its website says, covers "the concepts, strategies, and approaches of internationalization, the internationalization of the curriculum, and issues surrounding international students and cross-border delivery of education."

Another example may be found in assorted different scientific monographs in which "international education" is often linked to "comparative education." This appears in David Phillips's and Michele Schweisfurth's *Comparative and International Education: An Introduction to the Theory, Methods and Practices* (2007). However, the third chapter is entirely devoted to the areas of practice and lines of research in *International Education*. Considering the opinion of some authors, this chapter is highly relevant because it is an innovation in terms of what *International Education*

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4 Edited by David Phillips, from Oxford University, this journal has been published quarterly since 2006, exclusively in digital format. See http://www.wwwords.co.uk/rcie/ [accessed March 2012].
5 Published since 1997 as the scientific voice for the Association for Studies in International Education, which in turn comprises a number of associations on International Education including European ones such as the European Association for International Education. It is available from the site: http://jsi.sagepub.com/ [accessed March 2012].

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

conceptually means and what its connection with *Comparative Education*[6] is, to the point that the description it gives of *International Education* cannot be found anywhere else in contemporary scholarly literature[7].

As with journals, we find books with specific titles. In Spanish, María Jesús Martínez Usarralde has recently coordinated a book quite simply entitled *Educación Internacional* (2009).

In the first chapter, Antonio Luzón and Mónica Torres wonder whether *Comparative Education* and *International Education* are identical or similar (2009; 17)[8]. To us, both are disciplines on their own right but they are interrelated. Strictly speaking, *Comparative Education* studies convergences, divergences and trends among national educational policies. *International Education*, then, compares international educational policies, i.e., any educational policy whose sphere of influence rises above national borders and smoothly penetrates a set of countries.

Having reviewed *Educational Policy*, *Comparative Education* and *International Education*, we can now focus on *Supranational Policy of Education* (or *Supranational Education*) itself.

2. PLACING *SUPRANATIONAL EDUCATION* IN CONTEXT (II): DEFINITION AND OBJECT OF STUDY

Supranational Education as we understand it here has open, permeable borders with the three disciplines stated in Figure 1 above. Closely related to them, it aims its sights higher than their fields of study. Furthermore, as explained later on, it specifically involves global policies in education, fundamentally from international organizations, not in its strict sense but rather interpreting as educational policy any action in terms of education, teaching or training that are put into practice from those organizations, or any proposal that arises from them as a recommendation global in nature for education, teaching, or training.
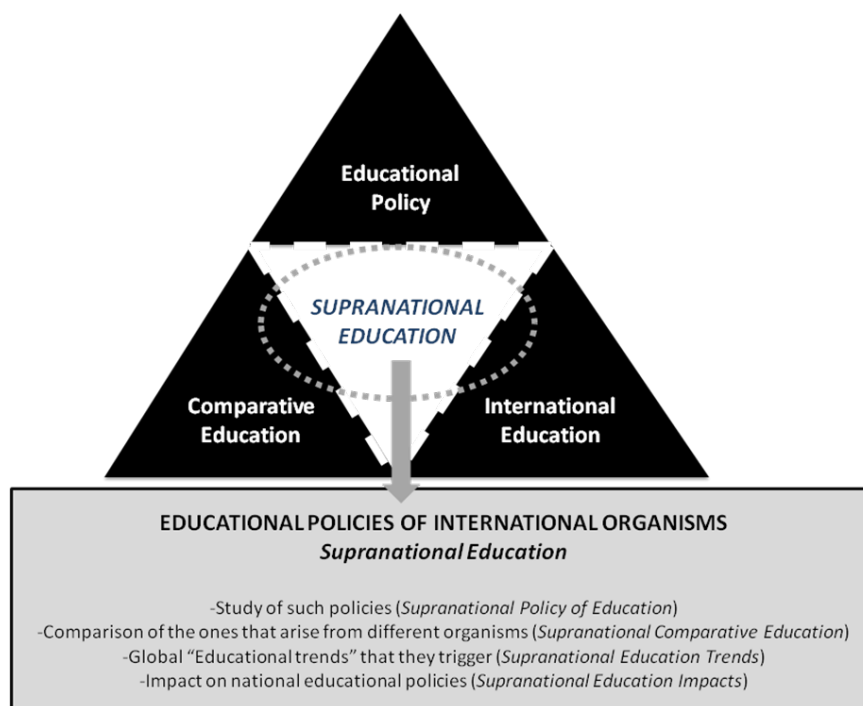
To recapitulate, the specificity of interests of *Supranational Education* focuses on the study of educational policies of international organizations (see Figure 2).

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6 This, for example, is the opinion of Monica Mincu at the University of Turin, in her review of the book in *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies,* Vol. 14(1), pp. 152-156, 2009.

7 Epstein states it in the introduction to the book itself (Phillips and Schweisfurth, 2007: IX).

8 The authors propose three lines of debate based on a study of the question founded on a broad review of the literature: a) *International Education* is a subdiscipline of *Comparative Education* which addresses comparisons more pertaining to mobility, harmonization of curricula, etc.; b) *International Education* differs from *Comparative Education* with a field of interest focused on the organization of student and teacher exchange programmes and the startup of actions intended to recognize diplomas, equate periods of study, etc.; c) *International Education* is an evolution of *Comparative Education* and has made the latter replace the former these days, encompassing it due to the phenomenon of globalization and the appearance of supranational political realities that transcend national realities as units of comparison.

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
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JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

Figure 2: Objects of study in *Supranational Education*

Source: original material.

According to the figure, *Supranational Education* (broad sense), which attempts to study the educational policies of international organizations, includes mainly four approaches (strict senses):

a) *Supranational Policy of Education*: The description and interpretation of specific actions in terms of education and training from the institutions which make up different international organizations, as well as the recommendations made to their Member States or programmes and plans developed for them or for third-party states.

b) *Supranational Comparative Education*: It also covers the comparative analysis of the policies of different international organizations, in strict application of the methodology from *Comparative Education* but applied here no longer to national units of comparison (the inter-national perspective) but to international units -each international organization- (the supra-national perspective)[9].

c) *Supranational Education Trends*: Particular attention is paid to policies from international organizations that show the greatest geopolitical spread and become global movements in education.

d) *Supranational Education Impacts*: It analyzes the specific impact such policies have on countries, i.e., on particular national education systems[10].

Combining Figures 1 and 2, Figure 3 provides an overview of these four different, but related disciplines, and gives us an idea of the boundaries between them as we have proposed here.

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9 There is a precedent in Spain from a doctoral dissertation in this line, defended in 2011 and entitled *The European Dimension of Education: Comparative analysis of its development in the supranational perspective* (DIESTRO, 2011).

10 We may make that interpretation in the last monographic section in the *Revista Española de Educación Comparada,* coordinated by Ferran Ferrer (2012), entitled "Pisa: Aportaciones e incidencias sobre las políticas educativas nacionales ('Pisa: Contributions to and effects on national education policies').

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

Figure 3: Proposal for a divisional contrast of the objects of study
of *Supranational Education versus Educational Policy*, *Comparative Education*
and *International Education*
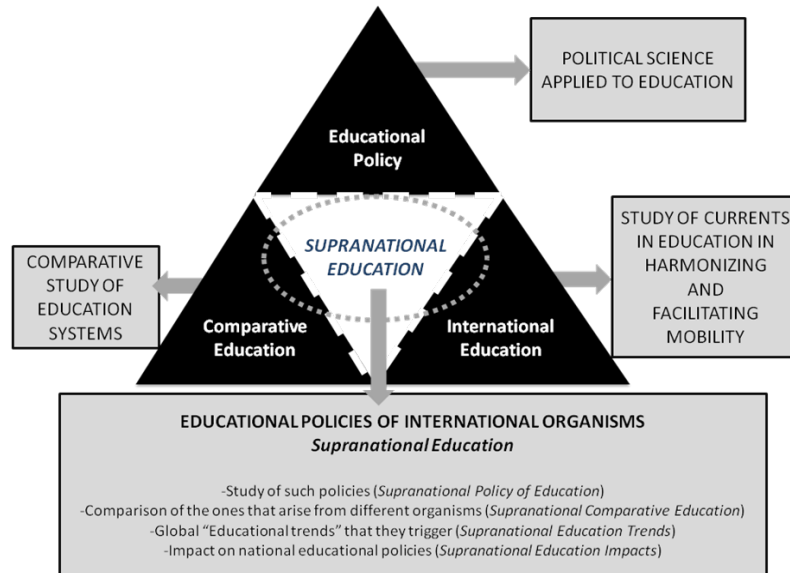
Source: original material.

As previously said in reference to the *Educational Policy*, it includes both the *policy* and the *politics*. Thus, the *Supranational Education* covers the study of the actions of international organizations on educational matters (facts and results) as well as of the factors and dynamics that led up to such actions.

The study of the actions -*policy*- results in an area of the discipline that is more synthetic (historical-descriptive), focused on a tale of policy actions, policy phenomena, and starts off as a fundamental source of the primary (basically normative) documentation that gives rise to such actions. Therefore, in the case of international organizations, *policy* involves going through all the documentation emanating from them, taking its historical context into account, in the shape of recommendations, guidelines, action plans, work programmes, etc.

But the study of the factors behind these actions and these results obliges us to take into account the other dimension of this discipline -*politics*- which is no less important and, in our opinion, can be even more interesting than the other one: the analytical, interpretive dimension. Its sources are from preliminary work documents leading up to the norm, such as authors' reflections on the issue, interviews with protagonists, historical and comparative research studies, etc.

For this second dimension we will draw from Manuel de Puelles (2008) to construct a set of items of analysis as likely parameters for interpretation (or even as parameters of comparisons between different International Organizations).

1. **The actors.** The first element of interpretation. The following actors are among those to be found in the case of international organizations:

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
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a) **Institutions**. Every international organization has a complex institutional framework. It is essential to know and interpret it correctly in order to draw reliable conclusions on how its policies evolve. The fine balance between them and their various decision-making mechanisms become unavoidable realms of study.

b) **Lobbies**. In international policy, the interests of businesses, associations, unions, professional corporations and other groupings of a financial, social, or professional nature are represented by means of structures for pressuring and influencing decisions known as 'lobbies'. They require special attention if we are to understand the dynamics that make a particular policy emerge.

c) **Member States**. Regardless of their representation in the institutions of every international organizations, the sovereign institutions of its Member States must be considered as another group of actors on the political stage. The relationships between them, their particular interests, strategic alliances, socio-political or momentary economic contexts are clearly decisive factors in determining where a particular policy is ultimately headed in an international organization, and may even determine how successfully it is implemented. Moreover, in some cases, there may also be highly influential local or regional powers that may transcend national borders. They are a source of discord and consensus that can make of an international initiative a very dynamic undertaking.

2. **The dynamics of designing the policies.** With so many highly complex actors, it is often difficult to ascertain the balances of power, but this does not mean they need not be studied. The normative tracking of an international policy requires careful reading of a vast amount of primary documents written in a way that is not easy for novices to understand.

3. **The dynamics of carrying out policies**. Similarly complex is putting a specific policy into practice in different international organizations. How each action is implemented varies greatly, depending on the normative function upon which it is based and on the organization in which it was initiated. This diversity demands that each international policy be carefully analyzed in light of this factor.

4. **Ideologies**. The ideology of the dominant group has always been one of the most important elements making up political endeavours initiated by a social collective. The ideologies of different groups of actors involved in the policy are in tension, the resolution of these dynamics of tension become the source of the discord and the quest for consensus that become the real drivers of political action. Because of the large number of actors in international organizations, the number of ideologies increases accordingly, as do the nuances in interpreting them even within groups of actors which presumably have them in common. Studying them is essential for understanding the many actions that are started up.

5. **Values**. Values are very close to ideology, although one cannot equate the former with the latter. They represent the set of facts or phenomena we deem to be positive, and that come from a specific worldview and configure how we act and behave in it[11]. The specific *sphere of values*[12] of each group of actors makes up the defence of some particular policies; the confrontation of the various different spheres creates a sphere of shared values that can sketch out the political action of consensus. The study of these confrontations and results of consensus to which they lead offers large amount of interpretive information for analyzing a policy. This is particularly true in

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11 We will not engage further in the debate on the concept of "value". From the merely linguistic approach, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as "the regard that something is held to deserve; the importance, worth, or usefulness of something". (*OED* online available at http://oxforddictionaries.com [accessed 21 February 2013].

12 The "sphere of values" concept (VALLE, 2008a: 129-149) stems from intersubjectivist considerations and is preferred over the traditional concept of "hierarchy of values" because it is more accurate for examining highly complex policies.

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

education, whose aim is the best development of the person and is linked to anthropological, value-based conceptions. It is even more true in the context of international *organizations*, where the myriad nations —and thus different cultures— makes it hard to establish a set of values as clearly predominant over others[13].

6. **Education systems**. Ever since Bertalanffy's Systems Theory (1973) was applied to State-backed institutions to develop a public policy of formal education, the concept of "education system" is one of the most specific material objects on which to perform studies in both *Education Policy* and *Comparative Education.* This includes many different phenomena and associated factors[14]: purposes of education, structural organization, curriculum, teacher training, school management, educational administration, financing, etc. Although no international organization has direct competency over these aspects, these elements of analysis may certainly be objects of study in Supranational Education Policy, since they are the basis upon which such organizations propose actions of greater or lesser intensity (work plans, recommendations, programmes for cooperation, etc.).

7. **The context**. The broadest framework of interpretive analysis of *Education Policy* is affected by temporary and historical determinants present at all times. The supranational field takes into account not only national context but international contexts as well, which are much broader in scope due to the diversity of facts that condition it and because their interrelationship runs so deep that their study becomes tremendously broad and complex.

These seven factors must be studied as an integrated whole. They are not separate aspects. Their mutual influence requires a holistic approach. Nowadays, this makes particular sense within the framework of international organizations whose presence is gaining greater significance.

3. PHENOMENA THAT ARE DRIVING FORCES BEHIND *SUPRANATIONAL EDUCATION*

There have been a series of phenomena that have brought about the appearance of *Supranational Education* as understood here, and reinforce it as a necessary discipline, with its own thematic areas of study as mentioned before.

The first phenomenon is **globalization**. The advent of information technologies and communications, the Internet, and the evolution of means of transportation have turned the planet into the "global village" as defined in the late 20th century[15]. No education system can be interpreted currently without taking into account the planetary-wide spread of information and communication. We agree with Caruso's statement that "the emergence of "global" or "trans-national" as specific causal variables in the field of education phenomena has radicalized the need to understand educational practices beyond their national borders" (CARUSO, 2011: 9).

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13 However, the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNO, 1948) by nearly all these organizations permits a framework of axiological minimums.

14 It suffices to take a quick look at the most visited subject matters from studies on education systems by Eurydice, the network on education information in Europe. The publications referring to thematic studies are available online at http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic_studies_en.php [accessed November 2012].

15 The concept developed out of the work of Herbert Marshall McLuhan, particularly since the 1962 publication of *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press). After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the Club of Rome published a report called *The First Global Revolution* (Barcelona, Círculo de Lectores, 1992), a lucid analysis in which the concept is adopted as a category for interpreting the social phenomena of the time. In a more contemporary view, several works have appeared over the last decade with detailed analyses on the effects of globalization. One example is that of Anthony Giddens *(Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives,* Spanish translation, Madrid, Taurus, 2000) or that of Octavio Ianni *(Teorías de la globalización,* Madrid, Siglo XXI, 2006).

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

This becomes manifest in the volume of publications relating the concepts of globalization and education in recent years[16], and in some of the conferences on education which address this subject[17].

In a global context like this one, the second phenomenon is **mobility** from all walks of life, particularly students, teachers and professionals. In the European Union, this has become more important ever since Article 9 in the current Treaty of the Union states "Anyone who has the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union" (COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2010) while acknowledging that the citizens have "([...]) the rights, freedoms and principles set forth in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union," among which is the right "([...]) to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States" (COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2000: art. 45).

The third phenomenon, and one more decisive in the development of Supranational Education Policy as an academic and scientific discipline, is the **proliferation of international organizations** since the mid-20th century. As the biggest human and economic catastrophe in our history as a species, World War II led to the need to find new ways for nations to relate to each other, and to the emergence of new, supranational frameworks to arbitrate the new international order.

There are plenty of examples of international formations, both European and worldwide, that arose in the late 1940s, and there is quite a lot of literature deal in this regard (Reuter, 1967; Medina, 1976; Díez de Velasco, 1999). Worth noting here are the ones with great geopolitical influence and impact on educational policies nowadays: the United Nations (UN)[18], the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)[19], the Council of Europe[20], the European Union[21] and the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI)[22].

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16 In no way meant to be exhaustive, the list below provides some of the ones deemed relevant in the Spanish language:
- PEREYRA, M.A.; GARCÍA MÍNGUEZ, J.; y BEAS, M. (Comps.) (1996): *Globalización y descentralización de los sistemas educativos* (Barcelona, Pomares-Corredor).
- *Revista de Educación,* nº extraordinario de 2001, "Educación y globalización" (Madrid, MEC).
- AA.VV. (2001): *Educación y Globalización: Los desafíos para América Latina.* Temas de Iberoamérica. Volumen 1 (Madrid, OEI – CEPAL).
- BONAL, X.; TARABINI-CASTELLANI, A. y VERGER, A. (Comps.) (2007): *Globalización y Educación.* Textos Fundamentales (Buenos Aires, Miño y Dávila).
- CARUSO, M. & TENORTH, H-E. (Comps.) (2011): *Internacionalización. Políticas educativas y reflexión pedagógica en un medio global* (Buenos Aires, Granica).
- BONAL, X. y TARABINI, A. (2011): Globalización y política educativa: los mecanismos como método de estudio. Revista de Educación, nº 355; pp. 191-222 (Madrid, MEC).
- RAVENTÓS, F. y GARCÍA RUIZ, Mª. J. (Coords.) (2012): Educación Comparada, Globalización y Posmodernismo. *Revista Española de Educación Comparada,* nº 20 (Madrid, SEEC, UNED)
17 For example the special symposium of the Comparative Education Society in Europe held in Granada in 1994 under the title "Globalization and Decentralization of Education Systems" and the X National Congress on Comparative Education from the Spanish Society of Comparative Education, which bore the title "The Right to Education in a Globalized World" held in San Sebastian in 2006.
18 Founded in 1945. Today it includes 193 Member States. It is based in New York City. All its information is available in real time online at:
http://www.un.org [accessed November 2012].)
19 Founded in 1948. Currently made up of 34 countries. Headquartered in Paris. All its information is available online at:
http://www.oecd.org/ [accessed November 2012].
20 Founded in 1949. Currently includes 47 Member States. Headquartered in Strasbourg. All updated information available online at:
http://www.coe.int/ [accessed March 2012].
21 Formed as of the Schuman Declaration of May 9, 1950. Today it brings together 27 Member States. All its information is available online at:
http://europa.eu/ [accessed November 2012].
22 Founded in 1949. Today it consists of 23 countries. The head office is in Madrid. All its information is available online at:
http://www.oei.es [accessed November 2012].

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

Originally, none of these international organizations—except for the OEI—explicitly listed education among its domains of involvement, focusing instead on peace, democracy, development and economic cooperation. However, it soon made its appearance in their political agenda, because all those organizations realized that actuation in education would help achieve their goals. Thus, for example, out of the United Nations quickly emerged the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO); the OECD set up a Directorate of Education, and was soon creating agencies such as the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI); the Council of Europe created the Steering Committee for Education (CDED); and the European Union used the Treaty of the European Union (COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 1992) to add education as one of its own areas of action. Actions on educational matters from these organizations have been sparking interest from researchers and scholars for years (MARIN IBÁÑEZ, 1983; VALLE, 2004; PEPIN, 2006; VALLE, 2006; PAYÁ, 2009), which reinforces their consideration as potential objects of study in an academic and scientific discipline.

All the actions in educational concerns emanating from international organizations such as UNESCO, the OECD, the Council of Europe, the European Union or the OEI may be considered "policies" in the broad sense. Essentially, they are, as mentioned above, the object of study of *Supranational Education.*

Manuel de Puelles made this point clear when he wrote of "the supranational levels of decision-making" (2008: 55), although he was referring specifically to the European Union, and stated, "Be that as it may, the study of this level of decision-making [...] should, for reasons obvious today, constitute a new field of knowledge of educational policy" (2008: 57).

Let us look, then, at some of the policies generated from these "supranational levels of decision-making."

4. SOME CONTEMPORARY SUPRANATIONAL EDUCATION POLICIES

In this section we highlight some of the policies that arise from supranational levels, not presenting them from the organizations that generated them but rather within broad circles according to their nature. This will let the reader become aware of the fact that units of comparison can also be established from the supranational stance simply by applying the comparative method for differential study of how different organizations develop policies in those different circles[23].

4.1 SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES REGARDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES

The emergence of international organizations has made it easier to coordinate common strategies in a globalized world. Some of the most significant examples of this are: the *Education for All*

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23 This presentation is clearly not meant to be exhaustive, but to offer many different examples involving the most relevant policies. The author is aware of the fact that there are many others that may likewise be considered worth noting, such as the World Bank or the International Association for the Evaluation o Educational Achievement (IEA), etc., but that their inclusion would overstep the aims of this section.

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

strategy from UNESCO, the *Educational Goals 2021* project from the OEI and the *Education and Training 2020 (E&T 2020)* strategy from the European Union.

a) Education for All began in 1990 at the World Education Forum in Jomtien, under the auspices of UNESCO, and was reiterated later at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. The participating states are taking on six sweeping challenges in education for 2015: to extend early childhood care and education; reach compulsory free primary education for all; promote the acquisition of young people's and adults' competences and needed for lifelong learning; increase adult literacy by 50%; attain full gender equality at schools; and improve the quality of education. The latest follow-up report (UNESCO, 2010) indicates that in spite of the progress made, there is still much to be done, since the governments have not managed to remove inequality in education in the most marginal sectors of the population, thereby making it necessary to have educational policies with more inclusive school systems.

b) The purposes of the Education Goals for 2021 Project[24] are similar to those of Education for All but differ in that the scope is Ibero-American rather than global. Not in vain, it was started from the OEI at the meeting of their Ministers of Education at the 18th Conference (El Salvador, May 19, 2008), and in that same year witnessed a document in debate from then up to its final version (OEI, 2010). The objectives are described in Chapter 4 of the final document and are organized according to 11 general goals, 28 specific goals and 39 indicators, each of which has been given a level of achievement.

c) The Education and Training 2020[25] strategy (COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2009) is the successor to what had been designed for the decade 2000-2010. Because it was less successful than expected[26], it was subsequently revised, especially in light of the new situation marked by the economic downturn of 2007.

The current strategy comprises a set of priorities on education and training to be developed jointly by the European Union and its Member States under the so-called method of reinforced cooperation. The plan is organized around four strategic goals in education: to make lifelong learning and mobility a reality; to improve the quality and effectiveness of education and training; to promote equality and social cohesion and active citizenship; and increase creativity and innovation at all levels of education and training.

The strategy gives five specific reference values: adult participation in lifelong learning (for 2020, and average of at least 15% of adults should take part in lifelong learning); persons whose achievement is low in the basic skills (for 2020, the number of 15 year olds with low achievement in reading, math and science —in terms of the PISA categories— should be lower than 15%); achievement in subjects in higher education (for 2020, the proportion of people between the ages of 30 and 34 who have completed

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24 The process of constructing these challenges takes on enormous interest for Supranational Education Policy and it is very easy to follow, since all the documentation generated throughout its debate is available online at http://www.oie.es/metas2021/libro.htm [accessed March 2012] .

25 The complete strategy develops as of "Conclusions from May 12, 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in the area of education and training" E&T 2020 (2009/C 119/2). *Diario Oficial de la Unión Europea,* serie C, nº 119 of 28 May 2009. Available unabridged at

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:ES:PDF [accessed April 2012].

26 The monograph from Issue 16 of the *Revista Española de Educación Comparada* was devoted to analyzing a part of that strategy. Under the title "The 2010 Work Program on objectives needed for education systems in the European Union" and coordinated by Diego Sevilla and Antonio Luzón, it provides a clear overview of the achievements and challenges made in that regard (SEVILLA and LUZON, 2010). Even there, Novoa pointed out a "critical feeling regarding the results obtained" (2010:33).

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

Higher Education -CINE levels 5 and 6- should be at least 40%); dropout rates in education and training should be below 10% (the proportion of eighteen to 24 year olds who only have middle school or less and have stopped pursuing any further education or training); early childhood education (for 2020, at least 95% of the children between the ages of 4 and the age starting compulsory education should take part in early childhood education).

These three initiatives show that it is possible to reach supranational agreements globally on large goals in educational policy. Still, the objectives are limited and rather general for several reasons: first, because of the cultural, social and economic diversity and wide range of countries aspiring to them; second, because attaining them depends on each nation's political will to do so, although support from the international organizations should be the driving force behind achievement of the goals; and last, because the level of each country's involvement and commitment to achieving them is highly unequal.

4.2 SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES THAT FACILITATE MOBILITY IN TERMS OF DEGREES AND LENGTHS OF STUDY

The establishment of bilateral agreements for mutual recognition of professional and academic degrees has a long background. However, as a line of supranational education policy, we will focus on agreements deriving from multi-national relations among nations or from the guidelines emanating from international organizations. In the case of recognition of degrees, the most representative agreement in force at present is called the Lisbon Convention of 1997 on the recognition of Higher Education degrees for Europe[27], signed jointly by UNESCO and the Council of Europe. Even so, it was not the first of such agreements, having had a predecessor in the Convention on Academic Recognition of University Qualifications from 1959[28].

Closely related to the recognition of academic qualifications are the conventions on university admissions that have been taking place since the 1950s[29] and formalized in Recommendation R98-3 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Member States on Admissions to Higher Education, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on March 17, 1998[30]. This involves one of the most fruitful endeavours to provide ideas on making harmonizing university admissions, a product of the three-year project on Access to Higher Education (1993-1996), which led to productive results (VALLE, 2008 b: 140). It is significant to note that it came about only a few months after the above-mentioned Lisbon Convention of 1997.

In terms of recognizing periods of study undertaken at institutions of Higher Education abroad, we also find significant conventions from the Council of Europe itself. The first one took place

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27 COUNCIL OF EUROPE – UNESCO (1997): Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European region. Council of Europe – UNESCO joint convention. Lisbon, 11 April, 1997. *The European Treaty Series,* nº 165.

28 COUNCIL OF EUROPE (1959): *European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications, The European Treaty Series* nº 32).

29 COUNCIL OF EUROPE (1953): *European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities. The European Treaty Series, nº 15.* COUNCIL OF EUROPE (1964): Protocol to the European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities. The European Treaty Series, nº 49.

30 COUNCIL OF EUROPE (1998): Recommendation nº R (98) 3n of the Committee of Ministers of the Member States on Access to higher Education (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 17 March 1998 at the 623rd meeting of the Ministers´ Deputies. *The European Treaty Series.*

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

in 1956 [31], while the one currently in effect, the European Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study[32], dates back to 1990.

4.3 SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES ON HARMONIZING EDUCATION SYSTEMS

There are many different movements in education geared towards harmonizing educational systems on a global level. Beyond the common points shared by the different education systems and that represent some of these "movements in education" (ROSELLÓ, 1966) —such as making compulsory education longer, generalizing access to early childhood education, skills-based learning, periodic assessment of the education system, social and educational inclusion, etc.- we highlight here two examples[33] of the effort made worldwide to exchange shared visions of education systems: the *International Baccalaureate* and the *European Higher Education Area.*

a) The International Baccalaureate[34] was established in 1968 by a non-profit education foundation based in Geneva (Switzerland). It originally included a Baccalaureate curriculum taught at International Schools (basically private) whose diploma was recognized by various different universities and was meant to address the education needs of the children of functionaries of international institutions posted abroad.

Today's International Baccalaureate has spread to the point of becoming a harmonized curriculum in content as well as methodology, based on principles of internationalism, cross-culturalism and excellence taught from the age of 3 to 19. It is divided into three levels: primary school from age 3 to 12, middle school from 12 to 16, and Diploma, from 16 to 19.

Its current impact is high and can be considered to be global. More than 3000 education centers take part in the International Baccalaureate (more than half of which are public) in 141 countries around the world with a total enrollment of more than 1,000,000 students. In Spain alone there are 57 centres teaching it, among which are many public secondary education schools.

b) The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is likely one of the best known and most visible supranational education policies and has generated the biggest volume of documentation, both normative[35] as well as from the scientific and scholarly literature[36]. Operating since 1999 based on the so-called Bologna Process, the EHEA currently involves a total of 47 countries from all across Europe. Since 2010 they all share a single structure for studies, based on three levels: Bachelor (generalist and professionalizing), Master (professional specialization), and Doctorate (geared toward scholarly research).

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31 COUNCIL OF EUROPE (1956): *European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study. The European Treaty Series,* nº 21.

32 COUNCIL OF EUROPE (1990): *European Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study. The European Treaty Series,* nº. 138.

33 Also relevant here are Key Competencies promoted from the DeSeCo project of the OECD and taken up by the European Union (2007).

34 Up-to-date information on the International Baccalaureate is available online at http://www.ibo.org [accessed November 2012].

35 All the official documentation is available at the EHEA website, currently available at http://www.ehea.info/ [accessed November 2012].

36 In Spain, the *Revista Española de Educación Comparada* has two monographic issues: nº. 12, entitled "The Bologna Process: Dynamics and challenges in Higher Education in Europe at the start of a new age" (PEREYRA (Coord.), 2006), and nº. 15, entitled "The European Higher Education Area: 10th Anniversary of the Declaration of Bologna" (SENENT (Coord.), 2009).

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

Furthermore, the 47 nations organize their curricula in accordance with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), which means using the same scale to weigh each subject and course by counting the total coursework time of the student, considering that each credit unit stands for 25 to 30 hours.

The EHEA also means that every diploma from a degree issued at any university in the 47 participating countries is accompanied by a "Diploma Supplement" that gives an accurate description of the professional profile of the student awarded that degree.

The advantages of this clearly harmonizing supranational policy are several. It makes it easier for mobility and for recognition of periods of study carried out at different universities, it makes it possible to recognize diplomas automatically from the 47 countries and it provides greater employability owing to the more precise information on the Diploma Supplement.

4.4 SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES ON HOMOGENEITY OF DATA COLLECTION ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND THEIR INTERNATIONAL COMPARABILITY

This section focuses on 3 blocks of policies: establishing shared frameworks for systematizing information; collection of homogenous data using standardized criteria (indicators) that produce comparable values and can be presented in reports of a global nature; and the design of homogenous tests for assessing education systems so that their scores can be compared directly.

4.4.1 SHARED FRAMEWORKS FOR SYSTEMATIZING INFORMATION

Many policies are designed to achieve this goal. The ones we will look at here are the Standardized Classification of Education, the Thesauruses, and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. These are the ones we deem as having the greatest global impact as points of reference in comparability from international organizations.

a) The Standardized Classification of Education is a project dating back to the 1970s, initiated by UNESCO at the 35th International Conference on Education (1975). At each International Conference on Education, the Member States present a report on the state of their education system. Based on such reports, UNESCO then publishes an Annual Report on the state of education around the world. Accordingly, it was necessary to come up with an instrument that could collect homogenous data at each level of education systems that in fact differ from country to country in terms of denominations, characteristics, and length.

The result is a standard classification for the education systems to refer to their different levels, and endorsed by UNESCO's General Conference of 1978. That classification has been revised on a number of occasions. The CINE currently in force dates from September 2011 (UNESCO, 2011b)[37] and sets nine levels of teaching, numbered from 0 to 8. They refer to the following stages in education: Early childhood education (0); Primary Education (1); Basic Secondary Education (2); Advanced Secondary Education

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37 All information is updated regularly and available at:
http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-standard-classification-of-education.aspx [accessed November 2012]

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

(3); Post-secondary non-higher education (4); Short-cycle higher education (5); Long-cycle Higher Education (6); Masters Degrees (7); and Doctorate (8).

The appearance of CINE made it possible to collect better data on each level of study from many different education systems around the world. Furthermore, it has provided an organizational framework to be used when designing and planning structural reforms of those systems, and over the years it has become more and more widespread throughout education worldwide.

b) The Thesauruses were established to agree on categories that represent the conceptualization of ideas that different countries express in different ways. More than mere translations, it attempts to establish complex taxonomies of education terminology across several languages.

The *European Education Thesaurus* is the result of a coordinated joint effort by the Council of Europe and the European Union since 1981. It took shape with the publication of its first version in 1991[38]. It is subject to constant review in order to be up to date.

In addition, *UNESCO's Thesaurus* has a more geographically global reach, being more than just European in scope. In addition to the fields of education and culture, it encompasses natural sciences, social sciences, human sciences and communication and information sciences, and now contains more than 7000 entries in English and 8600 in French and Spanish[39].

With the thesauruses, information can be searched not only in terms organized thematically and related to others, but also using meanings that have been accorded and delimited. In the field of comparative studies, its use is essential for successful research.

c) The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is a tool developed by the Council of Europe[40] and endorsed by the European Union to classify the level of any given student's linguistic competence in a foreign language. Its origins go back to the year 2000[41], although more recently, new guidelines were drawn up in 2008[42] and a manual was published in 2009 to help orient institutions wishing to offer language classes and assess the linguistic competences of their students in accordance with that framework (COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2009).

The framework makes reference to the four basic skills of linguistic competence: reading, speaking, writing, and speaking. Each skill is broken down into the specific skills that must be acquired to be classified in each of the six levels comprising it: A1 (basic user-1, breakthroughlevel); A2 (basic user-2, waystage); B1 (independent user-1, threshold); B2 (independent user-2, vantage); C1 (proficient user, effective operational proficiency,); and C2 (proficient user, mastery).

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38 A first revision was done in 1998. Since then, the online version is updated regularly. It is available at http://www.freethesaurus.info/redined/en/index.php [accessed November 2012].
39 Available at http://databases.unesco.org/thesaurus/ [accessed November 2012].
40 All their information is available online at the Council of Europe's website:
http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp [accessed November 2012].
41 COUNCIL OF EUROPE (2000) Resolution on the European Language Portfolio, adopted at the 20th Session of the Standing Conference (Cracow, Poland, October 2000).
42 COUNCIL OF EUROPE (2008) *Recommendation to member states on the use of the Council of Europe's* "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages" (CEFR) and the promotion of plurilingualism (and explanatory memorandum).

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

4.4.2 HOMOGENOUS DATA COLLECTION USING STANDARD CRITERIA (INDICATORS)

International organizations have employed considerable means to set specific indicators capable of assessing education systems using objective, comparable data. As a result, the OECD, for example, has set a whole constellation of them featured in their periodical publication *Education at a Glance.*

Although it would be impractical here to go into the whole set of indicators used by the OECD, it is enough to point out that the latest issue of Education at a Glance (OECD, 2011a) groups them into four sweeping categories, as usual. The first one refers to school and the impact education has, showing data on access to education, rates of enrollment, graduation rates for the various levels, expected length of schooling, scores on PISA, social benefits of education, impact of education on entering the job market, etc. The second category involves the financial and human resources invested in education, education spending as part of the wealth of the country and part of the public budget, the money spent per student, private investment in education, etc. The third category focuses on access to, and participation in, education and the flows of foreign students. Finally, the last category looks into the academic environment and the organization of the schools, exploring factors such as teacher/student ratios, hours spend in class, teacher salaries, assessment of the faculty's beliefs, practices and attitudes, how the faculty members respond to information about their work, etc.

Similarly, UNESCO's *World Education Report* provides an interesting set of homogenous indicators. It must be pointed out that in the most recent report issued (UNESCO, 2011a), they are well defined (pp.300-303) and based on a structure organized around the levels from CINE (although still using the CINE from 1997 rather than the updated version from 2011).

4.4.3 PERFORMING INTERNATIONAL ASSESSMENTS FOR COMPARISON

The need to have reliable international comparisons in terms of the achievement scores on education systems led the OECD to design a mid-term and long-term strategy to carry out international assessments that are broad in scope and highly reliable. Thus came about the *Program for International Student Assessment* (PISA)[43]. Through PISA, the OECD evaluates students of the age of 15 every 3 years, since this is the moment in which most education systems put an end to their compulsory education (OECD, 2011b).

The assessment is ~~done~~ carried out on three of the *Key Competences* (European Union, 2007): Reading, math, and science. Rather than a normal multiple-choice test of knowledge, it is instead a series of complex exams (standardized and adapted to the curricula and language of each participating country) that assess the student's ability to apply those skills to solving real-life problems.

The PISA exams were given for the first time in the year 2000 and again in 2003, 2006 and 2009[44]. Each PISA evaluation focuses on an in-depth analysis of a specific competence. In 2000 it was reading, in 2003 it was maths, and in 2006 it was science. Reading was assessed in 2009 again,

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43 All information on the program can be found on their official website at: http://www.oecd.org/pisa/ [accessed November 2012].
44 The results from the last year evaluated are published online at http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/ [accessed November 2012].

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

while it will be maths in 2012 and science in 2015. This repetition over the years generates results by country that make it possible to make diachronic and synchronic comparisons.

Apart from the evaluations, students are also asked to fill out surveys on a number of different variables (socioeconomic, cultural, etc.) and headmasters do the same regarding school variables. This results in an analysis of the achievements on the competences and also lets those data be crossed with factors that may be associated to those achievements.

The sample is broad and encompasses large and small schools alike, private and public, rural and urban, etc. from all the countries in the OECD and some others that associate with it for this program[45].

Still, PISA is not the only assessment programme run by the OECD. Their Teaching and Learning Survey (TALIS) is the first international survey with comparable data on the conditions that affect the teaching profession[46]. More recently than PISA, it was carried out for the first time in 2008 on a sample of 70,000 teachers and headmasters in 24 countries, focusing on teachers of Lower Secondary Education. The main variables under study in TALIS are the professional development of the teachers, the beliefs and attitudes of the faculty, their practices, their working conditions, etc.[47]

5. CONCLUSIONS: THE MOST IMMEDIATE AREAS OF INTEREST FOR SUPRANATIONAL EDUCATION

Bearing in mind the phenomenological panorama described above, the underpinnings of *Supranational Education* seem ready to defend its place as a scientific and academic discipline. From this perspective, and at this point, we believe this discipline may focus on the following areas of interest:

> **a) Delimiting the conceptual, epistemological, and methodological scope.** By narrowing the objects of study, reflecting on the most suitable research methods to approach them, and attempt to offer a discipline-wide reference framework to be used when relating with other disciplines such as Educational Policy, Comparative Education, International Education, History of Education, Philosophy of Education, Economics of Education, Sociology of Education, etc.

> **b) Internationalization of education.** In the sense of studying the most immediate consequences of globalization on education (e.g. exchanges and student/teacher mobility, recognition of degrees, or accrediting periods of study) and fostering measures that facilitate suitable development of these consequences. This dimension of the discipline would be very practical in nature, since it involves the design of the most daring and

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45 There were 43 countries that took part in 2000, 41 in 2003, 57 in 2006 and 65 in 2009. The complete list of participating countries in 2009 is available at:

http://www.oecd.org/education/preschoolandschool/programmeforinternationalstudentassessmentpisa/programmeforinternationalstudentassessmentlistofparticipatingcountrieseconomies.htm [accessed November 2012].

46 All the information on TALIS is available online at:

http://www.oecd.org/edu/preschoolandschool/creatingeffectiveteachingandlearningenvironmentsfirstresultsfromtalis.htm [accessed November 2012].

47 The first report with data on TALIS is OECD (2009): Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First Results from TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) (Paris, OCDE). Available online at: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/17/51/43023606.pdf [accessed November 2012].

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

effective ways to carry out policies to favour these matters. It is closely related to administration and management of education institutions, and with school leadership.

c) Study of global lines of education action. It has been years since Pedro Roselló took note of certain "education events" that are repeated at a certain time in different national education systems around the world. He conceived of them as "currents in education" (ROSELLÓ, 1996: 229). Accordingly, this third dimension in the discipline of *Supranational Education* involves identifying the most recurrent (and therefor global) educational trends and convergences in education systems, viewed from an international comparison viewpoint, and turning them into true lines of research shared jointly be the different countries but also by different international organizations. Taken as a whole, these subject matters may constitute the conceptual justification to worldwide harmonization of education as a trend in the globalized society of our times.

d) Policies of international organizations and supranational realities. This dimension of the discipline constitutes *Supranational Policy of Education* in its strictest sense. It is undeniable, as seen herein, that international organizations carry out actions in terms of education; on the whole, they may be considered *politics*. The study of the *policies* and *politics* favoured in each organization, of their points in common and of their contextual interpretation from the methodology of *Education Policy* constitutes a broad field of study, mostly unexplored as yet, but doubtless in the future it will be nothing to disdain.

Apart from these dimensions, there are other possible thematic areas that are closely related to *Supranational Education* and therefore open to debate as to whether or not they also fit inside its areas of study. Among the weightiest are *Education for Development, Education for Peace* and *Intercultural Education* (LUZÓN Y TORRES, 2009). However, the ones we have covered here are the most substantial as regards the recent literature.

Be that as it may, there are already very clear signs of how all these potential dimensions of *Supranational Education* give it epistemological entity and meaning as a discipline. Three examples suffice: the 2010 congress of the Spanish Comparative Education Society preferred to use "international" rather than "comparative" in its motto for the first time in its history of conferences, by naming it "Inequalities and Education: An international perspective" [48]. Moreover, there are a courses in Spain that are explicitly named as such or that clearly deal with these objects of study, such as "The quality of education from an international perspective," "Educational policy: the supranational vision," and "Educational Policies of the European Union." And finally, several well-known research groups have started to appear in these subject matters, bringing together faculty members from a wide range of areas.

Together, these data underwrite this as an emerging discipline. What remains to be seen is how it settles into the future of the academic and scientific world.

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48 The congress was held in Valencia from May 5-7, 2010, organized by the Department of Comparative Education and History of Education at the Faculty of Philosophy and Education Science at the University of Valencia. All information concerning it is available online at the Conference website: http://www.sc.ehu.es/sfwseec/con2010.htm [accessed November 2012].

Supranational Education: a new field of knowledge to address educational policies in a global world
Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

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Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

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Javier M. Valle López
JOURNAL OF SUPRANATIONAL POLICIES OF EDUCATION, nº1, pp. 7-30

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