ABSTRACT: During the two recent decades, the world has witnessed that regional conflicts are increasing because of the type of relationships among civilizations. Most of these conflicts have been resulted from political, social, and economical relations among Muslim countries and Western countries at the Middle East. In such a situation, for reducing millions of people’s sufferings, educational systems and especially higher education system surely play a vital role. Higher education system, through developing humanities-related disciplines, could increase levels of common understanding among intellectuals of the involved societies. On this score, comparative education has the power to encourage hearing other cultures out and international mutual understanding among people round the globe through educational system. Unfortunately, comparative education as a university discipline has not developed considerably at higher education systems in the Middle East countries. The present paper, first, tries to briefly explore the present situation of comparative education science in the region and, then, through comparing educational viewpoints of three Muslim pedagogues: Al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Al-Ghazali; and three famous educators of the West world: John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Dewey, demonstrate the possibilities of developing comparative education science as a university discipline in the Middle East. The comparisons between Muslim educators and their counterparts in the West, however, made in this paper have bilateral benefits.

KEY WORDS: Comparative education, educational perspective, Muslim, Middle East, pedagogues, Western, higher education system, and understanding.

INTRODUCTION

Following many Western countries, a historical description of comparative education exists in many societies. This description forms a public identity to prove that many logical and comprehensive attempts have been made to understand educational systems during the ages. This is an interesting subject to indicate those who have tried to make a precise survey of educational system. Some of these histories appear in travelogues and some others in disquisitions and printed books.

This is the case that the former President of the World Council of Comparative Education Dr. Abbas Madandar Arani is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Education LU (Lorestan University) in Iran; Mrs. Lida Kakia is a Ph.D. Student in Comparative Education at SU (Sofia University) in Bulgaria and at present works as a Teacher Counselor at different schools in Tehran, Iran; and Mrs. Batol Moazani is M.A. (Master of Arts) in Islam History and at present works as a Teacher at different schools in Tehran, Iran. The authors can be contacted via their e-mails at: rie2000@gmail.com and lida.kakia@gmail.com
On the other hand, Comparative Education (CE) discipline is still in embryo in many Islamic countries. Hence, it seems to be a mutual responsibility to establish and develop the discipline in Islamic world to explicate both its existing role among Muslim countries, and its position in developing international understandings.

As far as its first mission is concerned, it should be pointed out that CE, in spite of attempts made by many researchers in recent decades, is still deeply influenced by the old tradition of writing philosophical and literary disquisitions. For example, although CE as an academic discipline is still not familiar even for many educated people in Iran, few people might be found who are not heard of educational ideas of Al-Farabi, Al-Ghazali, Sadi, Avicenna, Hafiz, Rumi, and Nasir Khosrow. It is completely understandable that their ideas and educational teachings, after such a long time of a few centuries, are yet informative and invigorating for Iranians. The lifestyle of these people who already have been considered as intellectual thinkers and sophisticated teachers can still be viewed as proper models for all teachers and students in Islamic world (Nofal, 1993).

Iranian comparativists, studying the lives and works of these educators, will not only explicate the position of the discipline in Iranian higher education system, but help the Iranian youth in exploring their identities (Rajaee, 2003). In addition, the works of each one of these educators can function as a rich source for explicating the very existing of CE in the Islamic world. CE, through analyzing and comparing educational views of these scholars with that of great educators such as Kant, Pestalozzi, Rousseau, Locke, and Dewey, shows that Muslims and Iranians have already benefited from very rich intellectual and educational sources.

It is one of the responsibilities of CE researchers to survey the history of education with no dogmatism. Hence, as said by one of the present writers, Abbas Madandar Arani (2003), the development of a Regional Comparative Education seems to be necessary. In fact, ideas of these Muslim scholars can contribute in the establishment of “Regional Comparative Education Association” in the Middle East countries. The reason for such an association is their religious similarities and also the fact that they have written their books and disquisitions both in Arabic (main language for Arab countries) and Persian (for people of Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and some parts of Pakistan, India, and Turkmenistan).

Unfortunately, a quick study reveals that Muslim countries have not made use of this rich intellectual source in order to establish and develop different educational programs (Bachelor, Master, and Ph.D.) in the field of CE. For example, Turkey is the only country in the Middle East in which a comparative education society has been founded. Iran and Saudi Arabia have CE program at Master’s degree in a university each and the condition is even worse in other countries; B.A. students should pass a 2 or 3-credited course in the field of CE.

The second responsibility assigned to CE in Muslim countries can be analyzed based on R. Cowen's analysis and interpretations of academic atmosphere (Cowen, 1996 and 2000). Having considered a set of mainly political incidents during 1960-1990, R. Cowan coins the term “Read the Global” and shows the way in which scientific controversies and debates are being carried out in higher educational centers and universities.

Therefore, the writers of the present paper, based on the R. Cowen's analysis, believe that the common interpretations of scientific issues in the first decade of the 21st century affected by incidents like the attacks on September 11th, 2001, war in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as different terrorist attacks around the world might be considered as an analysis of the “Relationships between Civilizations”. Most of these conflicts have occurred in the Middle East based on economic, social, and political relationships between Muslim countries and the West (Al-Harthi, 2007).

In such a situation, educational systems in general and higher education in particular would have a crucial responsibility in relieving people’s sufferings. Higher education can increase a common understanding among educated people in involved societies by