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National Reports and Global Education Policy Diffusion: The case of the Teaching and Learning International Survey

*Informes Nacionales y Difusión Global
de Políticas Educativas: El caso del Estudio
Internacional de Enseñanza y Aprendizaje*

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DOI: 10.5944/reec.40.2022.31442

Recibido: **10 de septiembre de 2021**

Aceptado: **3 de noviembre de 2021**

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Abstract

Comparative research projects have become one of the main sources of information to investigate national systems of education and to inform education policy making at the national level. However, the way that national education authorities interpret and use the results of these projects may differ substantially among countries. This process, that we refer to as the national interpretation in comparative education, is overlooked in the debate regarding comparative research projects in education. This paper addresses this issue analysing national reports of the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) from eight different countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada (Alberta), Chile, England, Mexico, Portugal and Spain. The results indicate that the national interpretation and reporting of international comparative data is fairly homogeneous considering the socio-educational diversity of the selected countries. However, our analysis also suggests that reports from English-speaking countries (Australia, Canada, and England) have a higher degree of similarity with the survey's conceptual framework, whereas national reports from Mexico and Chile showed a lower degree of similarity. Moreover, our analysis reinforces the relevance of understanding countries' focus and interpretation of evidence produced by international comparative research projects in education.

Keywords: Comparative education; Education policy; OECD; TALIS; Survey research

Resumen

Los proyectos de investigación comparada se han convertido en una de las principales fuentes de información para investigar los sistemas nacionales de educación y para apoyar la formulación de políticas educativas a nivel nacional. Sin embargo, la forma en que las autoridades nacionales de educación interpretan y utilizan los resultados de estos proyectos puede diferir sustancialmente entre países. Este proceso, al que nos referimos como la interpretación nacional en educación comparada, se pasa por alto en el debate sobre los proyectos de investigación comparada en educación. Este artículo aborda este tema analizando los informes nacionales del Estudio Internacional de Enseñanza y Aprendizaje de la OCDE (TALIS) de ocho países diferentes: Australia, Brasil, Canadá (Alberta), Chile, Inglaterra, México, Portugal y España. Los resultados indican que la interpretación nacional y el reporte de datos comparativos internacionales es bastante homogéneo considerando la diversidad socioeducativa de los países seleccionados. Sin embargo, nuestro análisis también sugiere que los informes de países de habla inglesa (Australia, Canadá e Inglaterra) tienen un mayor grado de similitud con el marco conceptual de la encuesta, mientras que los informes nacionales de México y Chile presentan un menor grado de similitud. Además, nuestro análisis refuerza la relevancia de comprender el enfoque de los países y la interpretación de la evidencia producida por proyectos internacionales de investigación comparativa en educación.

Palabras clave: Educación comparada; Política Educativa; OECD; TALIS; Encuesta

1. Introduction

International organisations have undoubtedly expanded their scope of influence over the governance of international and national education policies. This influence is strengthened by transnational projects such as international large scale assessments, surveys and studies which are often seen as the main source of information on educational systems. Although the potential for analysis and use of data generated by these projects is widely propagated, there is still a lack of studies discussing the limitations of the information produced as to how they are interpreted and used differently at the national level. In other words, on how these results are translated into the national policy language. Most critical analyses in this regard focus on the relevance of international comparisons or the organisations involved and a smaller proportion is devoted to the critical analysis of the content of these data sources (Burns & Darling-Hammond, 2014). In order to narrow this gap, the present study analyzes one of the most prominent international comparison projects in education and seeks to identify how its' results are interpreted at the national level.

This article is divided into two parts. In the introductory part, we explore theoretical and methodological aspects of international comparisons in education using a project from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as the main reference. Our analysis is guided by three specific dimensions of this project's conceptual framework and methodology. These dimensions are more or less emphasised in the national reports and, as we argue, are the main points susceptible for and promoters of "national interpretation": Questionnaire translation, survey design and theoretical framework.

The second part of the article presents the comparative analysis of national reports from eight different economies/countries: Australia, Brazil, Chile, England, Mexico, Portugal, Spain and the province of Alberta in Canada. The results of this analysis indicate that, despite being highly standardised and centralised, these projects may also be subjected to national adaptation, in particular in their results' dissemination. This is of particularly relevance considering that national reports are often the main bridge between these international projects and national policies (Grek, 2009; Smith & Baker, 2001).

1.1. Teaching and Learning International Survey

Over the past five decades, the OECD has become one of the main players in global education, producing studies and policy recommendations for countries in the global north, as well as countries from the global south. In an era of increasing legitimacy of numbers, OECD has established niches of information diffusion, monitoring and assessment of education policies (Niemann & Martens, 2018).

One of the most relevant sources of comparative data on teaching and school education is the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey - TALIS. This project, coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), aims to "...provide current, comparable and useful information for policies, addressing the conditions of teaching and learning environments ..." (OECD, 2013, p. 15). With this intent, the project uses structured questionnaires administered with teachers and principals of secondary level education in more than 30 countries. The first cycle of the research was carried out in 2008, the second in 2013, and the current one was administered in 2018/2019. The research is based on national probabilistic samples that represent the universe of teachers analyzed in the selected level of education in a given

country. Although participating countries may choose to include in the analysis teachers that work in different levels of education, the standard level of education for all countries is the lower secondary, or level 2 according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).

While the comparative nature, comprising a high number of cases, is one of the main advantages of the research, this aspect also poses some limitations that are often underestimated or ignored in its use for educational research. In addition, considering TALIS as an initiative designed and coordinated by OECD, some conceptual issues regarding the alignment of the objectives of the study and the objectives of this international organisation also need to be considered as they affect how countries use their information.

We highlight the relevance of these conceptual and methodological issues in the next section with the objective of exploring the relationship between these aspects and the national interpretation of the data on the second part of this work.

1.2. Methodological

The Italian expression “traduttore, traditore” synthesises a common criticism of the translation process which, in the final analysis, could be seen as a betrayal to the original meaning of the text. In fact, it would be highly unlikely that at least one of the more than 30 translations used in TALIS would faithfully reflect all the questions contained in the root questionnaire, constructed from a set of categories and concepts based on a specific language.

In general, works that discuss this topic identify limitations and challenges of the translation process, but do not disregard the feasibility of international comparisons using the survey methodology (Braun & Harkness, 2005; Harkness *et al.*, 2003). Thus, in addition to monitoring the translation quality standards during the pilot and the pre-test, a linguistic quality control is performed by an independent agency that seeks to measure the translation quality of the consolidated instruments for each of its 32 versions (OECD, 2014a). Despite the effort to ensure reliable translations of the research instrument, it is important to note that not all of the terms used find exact correspondents among the participating countries, and a systematic problem of understanding a particular statement, however infrequent, can not be ruled out in the interpretation of the data. Similarly, questions based in concepts or terms that are either not well understood or not widely used in a given country may be ignored in their national reports.

For instance, questions related to the feedback received by teachers as a result of an observation or evaluation of their work constitute an important part of the main teacher’s questionnaire. The key term used in the original survey questionnaire to refer to this process is *feedback*. Both Portuguese versions from Brazil and Portugal maintained the original term without translation, and the Brazilian instrument is followed by the word “return” in parentheses as an explanation. Although the statement also has a description of what is considered as a *feedback*, the use of a foreign language word within the instrument may influence the responses, as well as how countries emphasise the results associated with this question. One possible indication of this influence is the lower percentage of omitted or invalid answers in feedback related issues between English-speaking countries compared to Portuguese-speaking countries.

In addition to translation issues, characteristics of the survey research methods can also influence the national interpretation of comparative data. First, the sampling used can be a source of errors that make any inference about the results impossible if it does not follow common and rigorous criteria. Thus, as in the case of TALIS, comparative

research generally centralises procedures for defining the sampling and sample selection criteria to ensure comparability of results.

However, even taking into account the quality of the samples, any estimates made have a standard measurable error that must be taken into account for the analysis. Consistently, the comparative analysis of these surveys ignore the standard error of estimates and draw conclusions that have no statistical basis. For example, by ranking the 34 countries surveyed by the percentage of teachers who agree that they “regret having become a teacher”, Brazil can be placed in either the 4th or the 9th position by considering a confidence interval of 95%. Countries with fewer observations may be even more susceptible to misleading comparisons, for example Chile, using the same confidence interval, could be placed in the 2nd or 15th position.

Similarly, aggregate measures at the national level can mask relevant domestic disparities within each country. In Brazil, for example, 70% of teachers agree with the statement that “thinking and reasoning are more important than curricular content”. However, the breakdown by state shows that this proportion is 80% among teachers in the state of Rio de Janeiro and 55% among teachers in the state of Paraná. Although there are common patterns within countries, there are still theoretical reasons for treating them as units of analysis, as discussed by Heath et. al. (2005, p. 330), “to accept the [national] state as a unit of analysis is to accept a questionable normative position.”

1.3. Theoretical framework

The process of building the TALIS research was supported by a variety of stakeholders, such as representatives from participating countries, academics specializing in education, representatives of teachers’ unions and officials from various international organisations (OECD, 2013).

Each of these parties participated in the planning of the project not only in a strictly technical way, but with a certain degree of power to defend their specific political interests. Although much of the theoretical and methodological principles of the research are the result of the dialogue and collective decision of these actors, the leading role of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in this process can not be underestimated.

In this sense, some considerations about the history of the OECD in relation to its educational projects should be highlighted. Its’ initial education projects date back to the 1960s and, given its’ initial mission to foster economic cooperation among member countries, education activities were not to be expected to escape this scope as pointed out by Eide (1990, p. 15): “Educational policy became interesting for the OECD because of its assumed importance for economic growth and development.”

However, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the organisation began to adopt a less restricted perspective on education which, according to Papadopoulos (1994) - one of the main OECD directors in this period, no longer has a view limited to the human capital theory, broadening its’ focus to include themes such as the democratisation of education, including also cultural and social dimensions in their educational research agenda. According to this author, this was due to the realisation that “the full range of objectives of education had to be taken into account if the educational activities of the Organization were to make their rightful contribution to economic policy” (Papadopoulos 1994:122). However, from the mid-1990s, following the neo-liberal and new public management waves, an apparent shift suggests that the organisation again took a narrower view of education as a tool for economic development. According to Rizvi and Lingard (2009, p. 452)

"This ideological shift has led the OECD to a radically different view of its policy work in education, now concerned less with debating philosophical issues about the purposes of education and the sociological conditions in which education can serve its various purposes, and more with the technical issues of performance management, exemplified most explicitly in its educational indicators project, PISA".

In fact, by analyzing initiatives such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), it is possible to identify the focus mentioned by Rizvi and Lingard (2009) on the performance of the system based on an evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of educational policies, which is built on a very restricted set of dimensions.

On the other hand, just as the strict utilitarian view of education remained active and widespread in OECD work over the course of five decades, it is possible to note that the broader view cited by Papadopoulos (1994) also lasted until the beginning of the 21st Century. In general terms, this perspective can be seen through the recent work of this organisation to promote the idea of inclusive growth (Mello & Dutz, 2012), which results in part from the belated realisation that some economic policies recommended by the organisation itself led to the aggravation of social inequality and, in turn, its' detrimental effect to economic growth.

In the field of education, some evidence of this perspective is present in the recent efforts of this organisation to contextualise the results of PISA using a more sophisticated description of the social and cultural environment of the students. This can also be seen in recent studies that address the issue of equity in education (Rønning Haugen, 2010).

Moreover, TALIS can also be seen as an initiative whose commitment is not entirely focused on assessing the efficiency of the education system as an instrument for economic development. According to the document that describes the conceptual guidelines of the research,

"...the overall objective of TALIS is to provide, in a timely and cost-effective manner, robust international indicators and policy-relevant analysis on teachers and teaching in order to help countries review and develop policies in their efforts to promote conditions for effective teaching and learning". (OECD, 2013 *apud* OECD 2014^a, p. 12)

This generalist nature of the study gives scope for overcoming the restricted view of "measuring" the teacher's impact on student proficiency and allowing the incorporation of elements from different educational perspectives. In this sense, it is important to emphasise the important role, even if limited to an advisory role, of the representation of Education International in the planning of research¹. It is, therefore, a project that allows for multiple analyses and interpretations.

Nevertheless, the proposal and the interests of the OECD are present from the conception of the research, through the questionnaire and in the published results and are the main theoretical orientation of the research for the international comparison. It is clear that the educational projects of this organisation are based on a limited view on the role of education that intentionally ignores or underestimates the social function

¹ TALIS: EI ensures that teachers' concerns are considered (25 July 2012) https://www.ei-ie.org/en/news/news_details/2241

of education in the name of valuing an instrumental function in the market economy (Morgan & Volante, 2016). In the case of TALIS, in particular, this can be perceived through the operationalisation and defense of a constructivist pedagogy appropriate to the production system and the creation of a unique model of the “good” teacher (Robertson, 2012; Sorensen & Robertson, 2020)

What are the mechanisms that make this OECD perspective then affect the way that countries disseminate TALIS results at the national level? In addition to the evident institutional affiliation of the project, the team responsible for the elaboration of the theoretical framework and the research instrument exerts a great weight on the theoretical orientation of the study. Van de Vijver and Hambleton (1996) argue that in order to avoid ethnocentric tendencies on the questionnaire it is important that the team responsible for the design of the instrument be multicultural and multilingual.

Although the study documentation does not contain details of the cultural background of the specialists involved, all six authors responsible for the descriptive document of the TALIS conceptual framework (OECD, 2013) have been affiliated with institutions in the United States, France, and Germany. This configuration has the function of facilitating greater coherence and conceptual alignment of the study with respect to the orientation proposed by the OECD.

This alignment can be observed from the selected themes to be addressed by the questionnaire (OECD 2013:22): Training, School Leadership, Evaluation, School Climate, Beliefs and Pedagogical Practices, Self-Efficacy and Job Satisfaction. From this perspective, the defining elements of teaching and learning are mostly related to intra-school aspects and direct responsibility of the school. This conception finds grounds for the restricted idea of accountability in the manner advocated by the OECD (Afonso, 2012; Cabral Maués, 2011).

The absence of questions regarding public educational policies, the school system, the professional career of teachers and their salaries, reveals the lack of themes and aspects of education that go against this theoretical framework.

Likewise, the analysis based on the information generated from this questionnaire have a limited scope to the topics that are discussed and considered as priorities by this conceptual framework of the OECD. In this sense, when comparing the national reports of Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Spain, England, Mexico and Portugal, prepared by the national agencies that coordinated the research, a structure similar to that adopted in the international report (OECD, 2014b) prepared by the OECD. In addition, the themes chosen for discussion are similar with emphasis on “professional development”, “teacher assessment” (Herradas Martin, 2021) and “school management”.

2. Materials and methods

To compare how different countries interpret and use the data produced by TALIS, we used an intentional sample of eight countries that were selected with the aim of providing a sufficient variation in terms of economic and social development, language and culture. Australia, England and Canada are among the countries with the highest Human Development Index (HDI) in the world, whereas Mexico and Brazil usually present two of the lowest HDI among TALIS participating countries. English, Spanish and Portuguese are the official languages of at least two countries in our sample. Finally, these countries also present a significant cultural variation, resulting from geographical location, colonial past, and multi-ethnic formation.

With the view to assess how countries interpret and use TALIS results, we analysed the reports produced by the national agencies that were officially responsible for collecting the data or representing the country in the administration of the survey. These national reports are essential for understanding how the data is used and disseminated nationally (Smith & Baker, 2001). Very often they constitute the only link between the data produced by the survey and policy making at the national level. In some cases, they are also the only source of systematic information about the survey available in the language of the country.

The electronic files containing these reports were downloaded from the OECD TALIS website² or from the website of the institution responsible for the report. The following table details which countries were selected for the analysis, the national institution that published the report and an approximate measurement of the length in number of pages.

Table 1.
Countries in the sample and respective institutions that published the national reports

Country	Institution	Year	Pages
Australia	Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)	2014	147
Brazil	National Institute for Education Research and Studies (INEP)	2014	33
Canada (Alberta)	Alberta Education	2014	169
Chile	Centro de Estudios MINEDUC	2017	211
England	Department of Education	2014	190
Mexico	National Institute for Evaluation of Education (INEE)	2015	203
Portugal	Ministry of Education (DGEC)	2014	113
Spain	Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD)	2014	140

Seven out of eight of the reports analysed were published by institutions linked to national governments. The exception is the Australian report (Freeman *et al.*, 2014) which was produced by an independent, not-for-profit organisation. Six reports were published in the same year of the international report, 2014, with the Mexican and Chilean reports being published in 2015 and 2017 respectively.

The comparative analysis of these reports was divided into two parts. First, we have examined and compared the structure of the national reports focusing mainly on the topics that were explored in each of them and how they were aligned to the main objectives of the survey stated in the TALIS conceptual framework. The specific issues discussed previously regarding translation, survey method and theoretical framework were used as references for the transversal analysis of the reports. This initial analysis resulted in a qualitative overview about the structure of the reports and how they followed or ignored particular aspects of the international perspective of the survey.

In the second part of the analysis, we have investigated the level of similarity between the national reports and the conceptual framework of the study which was operationalised by the teachers' questionnaire. For that, we have conducted a similarity analysis of the *corpus* of each report and the *corpus* of each section of the questionnaire. For instance, we transformed the Spanish national report into a plain text file (removing pictures, figures, appendices and bibliographical references) and compared the frequency of

² <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/talis-country-notes-and-country-profiles.htm>

words used in the report to the words used in each part of the questionnaire in Spanish. The same procedure was repeated for each country and the questionnaire in their correspondent language.

3. Results

All the reports analysed were organised in a similar structure. The division in chapters follow the same sequence and selection of topics adopted in the TALIS International Report (OECD 2014b). With the exception of the Chilean report, they all consist of an initial overview of the survey and of the socio-demographic characteristics of participating teachers, followed by professional development; teacher feedback and appraisal; teacher practices and beliefs; and self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Similarly, results from interviews with principals were analysed in a single additional section on the topic of school leadership.

The Chilean and Mexican reports have introductions from the ministers of education. Although short, these texts are the only instances among all countries' reports in which a political narrative is explicitly expressed. The reports from other countries do not contain any political or historical introduction to the educational system or the educational context of the country.

Although these reports are usually designed to address an audience already familiar with the national social and educational context, it is important to notice that these aspects are not systematically factored in at any point in the national interpretation of the survey's results. The clear exceptions are the reports from Mexico and Chile in which several national policies and socio cultural aspects are cited in the analysis.

As discussed previously, the questionnaire translation is a central aspect in the national interpretation of international data. Apart from the usual description of the project's translation processes, only two reports have addressed this issue explicitly. The English report (Micklewright *et al.*, 2014, p. 29), for instance, has a specific session about limitations of the results presented in which the authors mention the efforts made to deal with problems associated with cultural and language comparisons but acknowledge that "it would be naive to assume that all problems were either identified or resolved if found". Spain's report (MECD, 2014) also highlighted the fact that one translated version was administered for each of the five official languages in Spain.

One word utilised in the TALIS original questionnaire encapsulates the translation dimension of the national interpretation of the TALIS data. According to the original questionnaire (OECD 2014a:427), the word *feedback* is "defined broadly as including any communication you receive about your teaching, based on some form of interaction with your work (e.g. observing you teach students, discussing your curriculum or students' results)". As discussed before, non-English speaking countries have translated this term in different ways for their own instruments. Beyond that, the analysis of the reports also shows that this term was used to convey different interpretations and messages among Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries .

For Portugal (DGEEC, 2014), the term *feedback* is used throughout the report without translation. The Chilean report (MINEDUC, 2017) uses the term twice in the whole report whereas the translated word "retroalimentación", used in the questionnaire, appears 141 times. For Spain and Brazil, the term in its original English-version is used together with its translated term (*retroalimentación* and *retorno*, respectively). The

Mexican report is the only non-English one that does not contain the word *feedback*, referring always to its translated form *retroalimentación*.

Apart from the decisions regarding the translation of the term, the comparative analysis also shows that reports from Australia and Canada (Alberta) devoted more attention to the topic in comparison to other countries. The concept of *feedback* in the Australian and Canadian and English reports appear also in different sections including key-messages of the study. The chapters in which these results are presented, are proportionally longer in number of pages in the Australian and Canadian reports. This finding corroborates the reflections from Fernandes (2006) who locates the debate around the concept of teacher's feedback circumscribed to a specific anglo-saxon tradition.

Another relevant feature of the national interpretation of the TALIS data is the way national reports address methodological issues related to survey research and cross-cultural comparison. All the reports provide at least a brief description of the limitations of the methodological challenges of international comparisons and survey methods. However, the general message is that despite minor limitations, the data should be accepted as valid evidence for portraying the issues that they assess. This corroborates existent analysis of the methodological critique in PISA reports (Grek 2009:29).

Finally, the comparison between the reports indicates a general alignment with the OECD theoretical framework guiding the survey. As mentioned before, only the Mexican and Chilean reports provide a substantial discussion of the social and educational context of the TALIS results. However, even among them, some relevant concepts that fall outside the TALIS conceptual framework are not included. None of the reports selected mention or discuss poverty or inequality, for instance, these are virtually absent terms in these reports. This mainly due to the lack of information on that in TALIS instruments. The questionnaire contains only one item related to these concepts that asks teachers to estimate the broad percentage of students from "socioeconomically disadvantaged homes".

3.1. Quantitative

Although our qualitative analysis suggests that the English-speaking countries are more aligned to the OECD theoretical framework, it was not possible to measure to what extent the other countries would be more or less aligned using this approach.

To investigate this relationship further, we have compared the occurrence and frequency of unique words used in the national report and their similarity to the occurrence and frequency of the same words used in the questionnaire of the correspondent language³. This analysis followed three steps: First, we have transformed the context of each report and each section of the questionnaire into a plain text *corpus*. After that, we created a text matrix comparing each corpus within the language group. Finally, we have used quantitative to produce a measurement of similarity between each pair of documents. This procedure was conducted using the Cosine method from the "LSA" package in the software R, which uses an algorithm to measure the approximation of the meaning of two different texts.

Two documents with the exact same words would receive a value 1, whereas the pair of completely different document not using any common words would receive the value 0. The figure below shows the levels of similarity between the national reports and each section of the questionnaire in the correspondent language.

3 Questionnaires from Spain, Brazil and England were used as reference for Spanish, Portuguese and English as we have not had access to the questionnaires administered in other countries.

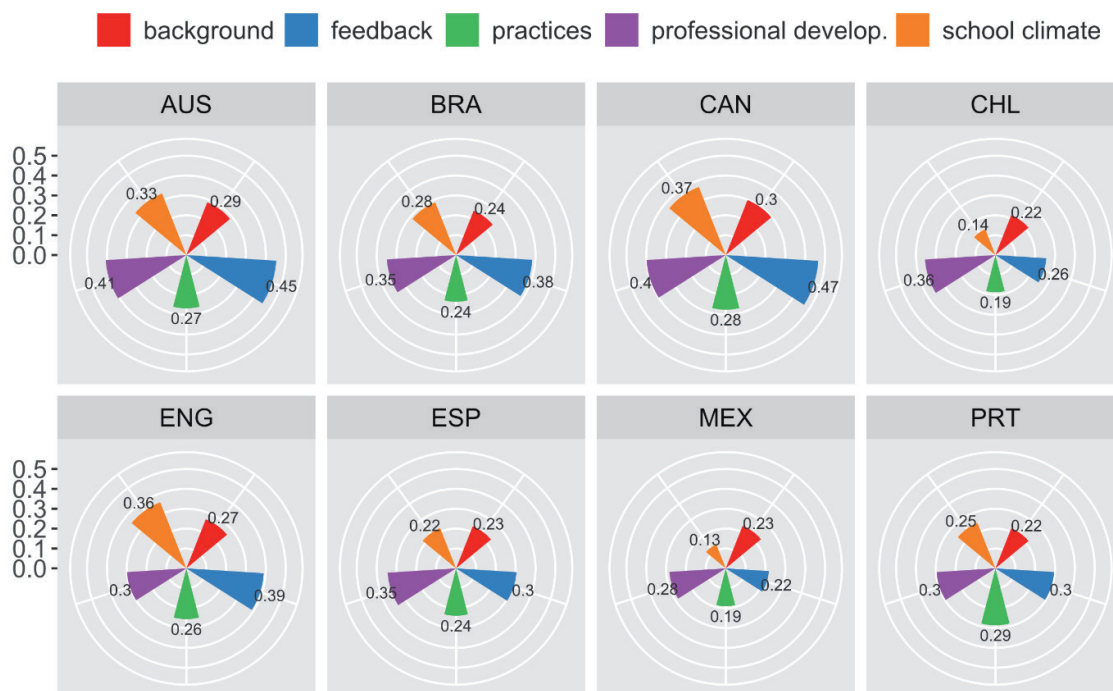


Figure 1. Similarity between national reports' verbatim and each section of the TALIS questionnaire, selected countries - 2013

Coherent with our qualitative analysis, we observed a higher degree of similarity between the English (0.31), Australian (0.35) and Canadian (0.36) reports and all the sections of the TALIS questionnaire. These countries also presented the highest levels of similarity for the section “Teachers’ feedback and appraisal” (England: 0.39, Australia: 0.45, Canada: 0.47). The Mexican (0.21) and Chilean (0.23) national reports had the lowest levels of similarity with their corresponding language questionnaire.

Four out of the five non-English speaking countries had the section on “professional development” as the most similar to their national reports, indicating that there is a higher alignment of these national reports’ approaches to professional development with the terms selected by OECD for the TALIS instrument.

The quantitative analysis also shows that among all countries cited in the Australian, English and Canadian reports, these three countries are the most often cited, suggesting that these reports use other English-speaking countries as reference for comparison. This is not true for other reports such as the Spanish in which Portugal is the most cited country and Brazil where Mexico is the most frequently cited country.

4. Discussion

The mere use of TALIS data as a source of information to compare educational systems in different countries does not necessarily imply the naive search for magical solutions (Ball, 1998) in education. Nor does it mean the uncritical adoption of the OECD conception of education. As pointed out by Loureço Filho (2004, p. 25)

"Comparative education does not offer solutions that can be implemented indistinctively to any people at any time. Each national society will need to discover their own cultural power, the conditions that made them arise and maintain them, the modes and forms in which they can develop more rationally".

This statement is related to the object of analysis of this study insofar as it suggests that none of the data collected by international comparative research in education can be examined in isolation from its theoretical and methodological basis and its social and cultural context. The feasibility of using such instruments to conduct studies in comparative education is directly related to the ability to contextualise the results and, more importantly, to know the theoretical and methodological limitations of the data.

As we have shown in our research, behind the apparent standardisation of TALIS national reports, countries do not have a uniform way of presenting TALIS data. The comparative analysis of the national reports shows a substantial variation regarding the topics emphasised and the key messages provided. Furthermore, we have confirmed that specific aspects of the survey such as translation, survey method and theoretical framework are important factors to explain the variation across countries.

Finally, we also observed that countries do not provide a critical approach to the conceptual framework of the survey which is aligned to the OECD perspective about education. However, it does not mean that the policy messages are a simple reproduction of the survey's conceptual framework. It should be emphasised that this argument is not a defense of the "messenger", as Phelps (2017) makes in relation to standardised tests, claiming that the criticism around standardises tests is an attack on the messenger rather than on the problem. On the contrary, what the present study has shown is that the message is full of limitations and biases and it has also different messengers at the international and national level.

Therefore, this work has debated the possibility of using information on the education systems of the countries, although in a sense and purpose different from those used in the construction of data, which presents as a productive territory and underexplored in the field of comparative education in the United States (Goergen, 2018) or the supra-national education policy (Valle, 2012).

And it is at this point that national governments have failed to use the results of international comparisons, as the analysis of the national reports pointed out. In the name of adopting the narrative of the messenger, one misses the opportunity to raise important questions that could not be debated except by comparative analysis with other countries.

Thus, taking into account all limitations, international comparisons based on research, such as TALIS, are useful and, in many cases, necessary since several educational phenomena are better understood from the knowledge of the "other", or the notion of how the characteristics of other educational systems resemble or differentiate themselves from the studied phenomena.

Finally, it is important to stress the limitations of the results of our investigation. First, the group of countries participating in TALIS is not representative of all countries in the world as it is comprised mainly by OECD members with higher economic development and better infrastructure for public education in comparison to most countries in the global south.

In addition to that, our sample of national reports may not even be representative of all participant countries as the selected countries seem to have at least a minimum

structure to produce a national report and, therefore, a higher statistical and policy capacity to read and interpret the data necessary for their analyses.

However, in this study, we provided evidence on the national variation of data dissemination in international comparative research in Education. We have demonstrated that eight TALIS national reports from a very diverse group of countries have a considerable level of alignment among them and with the OECD theoretical framework. However, the group of English-speaking countries have a higher level of alignment, and reports from Latin-American countries are the most dissonant among the reports analysed.

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