

Evaluation of a dissertation written by **Talar Agopian**, titled **Teacher Education in Lebanon: A Comparison of Programs in American and French-Patterned Universities**

The dissertation deals with a **topic** of teacher education and its effectiveness that is highly relevant and researched not only in Lebanon but all around the world and has been covered in a growing body of academic literature, as the dissertation doesn't forget to stress. So the choice of the topic of the dissertation is legitimized perfectly well, is clear, and the author also showed knowledge of the relevant literature.

There were three **general aims** of the dissertation (page 17): to describe structure and content of teacher education programmes in selected American and French-patterned universities; to research perceptions of effectiveness of teacher education programmes among graduates of those universities; to compare teacher education programmes of American and French-patterned universities and to figure out what are the similarities and differences between the two types of programmes. These three general aims have been elaborated into six specific **research questions** (page 55-57). The dissertation has addressed these research questions adequately. It also provides sufficient discussion of the many results in Discussion of results (page 114-122) that is well written and clearly connects the research findings with existing knowledge and existing body of relevant literature. For example, the graduates lack a better proportion between so called practical and theoretical courses in teacher education; the practicum in schools is longer in the French-patterned universities than in American-pattern ones; role of teacher mentors and systematic reflections on teaching practise was highlighted by the graduates.

My biggest concern regarding aims as well as results is connected with the **issue of reforms** (one of the rather ambitious and explicit output of the dissertation are suggested reforms in teacher education). Lebanon is effectively a failed state with a very low capacity to govern on its territory. This aspect of the national context has been touched only briefly (chapter Lebanon's multiple crisis, page 53-55) and not explicitly. However, state with a low capacity to govern is not able to implement its own rules and laws as well as decisions done by the executive power in the capital, or rulings issued by the judiciary. The problem of low capacity of the Lebanese state to implement reforms, based on decisions of the extremely weak central government, should be addressed more explicitly. I think the issue of reforms should be addressed in the context of a failed/decentralized state/education system more explicitly and take this fact into account explicitly.

Regarding **research methods**, we can say with a bit of simplification, that the first aim was researched based on content analysis of university websites and lists of courses of three American-patterned and three French-patterned universities. The second aim was researched based on conducting of twenty semi-structured qualitative interviews with fresh graduates from those six universities. The third aim was elaborated by comparative analysis. I think the selected methods of data collection and analysis are adequate, however regarding perceptions of effectiveness of teacher education programmes among graduates, I believe it might be fruitful to employ quantitative research methodology based on standardized evaluation questionnaires. However, the choice of qualitative methodology is legitimate and the reason for the choice was explained well.

My second concern is connected with the **comparative method and the literature review**. If there is French and American-patterned teacher education in Lebanon that complies with the French and American formal standards for teacher education, we could assume that the experience, knowledge and competencies of the graduates are similar in Lebanon and the United States/France. That is why I would welcome the chapter Literature Review (page 18-36) and Discussion of Results (page 114-124)

addressed more explicitly the relevant body of literature about teacher education in those two countries (US and France).

The dissertation is generally *well structured*; however, the *quality of chapters varies*. For example, the contextual chapter Higher Education in Lebanon (pages 46-53) is written very well and clearly demonstrates what are specific characteristics of Lebanon regarding Western style higher education (old tradition going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, role of external players, role of religious institutions, very diverse country with a very diverse education system). However, I would welcome at least brief information about the *national educational context that goes beyond the tertiary education* in Lebanon. For example, I find it very important regarding the performance of teachers in Lebanese schools, that Lebanon performs very low at PISA ranking (both 2015 and 2018 the lowest in the Middle East and North Africa region, worst even than Jordan and Morocco) with huge inequalities among pupils (rural versus urban, public versus private schools). Also, chapter Reform to Education in the Arab World (page 39-41) is rather weak, sketchy and focusing mainly of oil rich countries of the Persian Gulf. In fact, I am not sure if this chapter is needed in the dissertation.

*Language* and *style* of the dissertation is adequate; it is very readable text that I enjoyed. However, I would suggest reformulations of just few arguments or statements. For example, (page 47) "Christian missionaries and foreign states were doing important work in spreading education in Lebanon as early as the seventeenth century (...) with the intention of promoting education". Regarding intentions, I would assume than the intention was to promote Christianity and Western national interest in the context of the geopolitical struggle with the Ottoman empire. More importantly, however, adequate wording would be/use an adjective "spreading MODERN/WESTERN-STYLE education", since there were educational institutions in the Levant before/during Ottoman period (for example, contemporary Lebanon used to be a centre of Shia scholarship, many 20<sup>th</sup> century renowned Iranian and Iraqi Shia scholars has got ancestors there).

Question for defence. Based on the literature review, the dissertation highlights the fact that the lack of balance between so called practical and theoretical courses in teacher education as well as a lack of practical skills for teaching in a real classroom situation (practicum at schools and quality of it, including mentoring) are perceived as a general problem of teacher education by the graduates/prospective teachers not only in Lebanon. What is specific for Lebanon in this respect? If anything.

I think that the dissertation fulfils the standards for doctoral dissertation.

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